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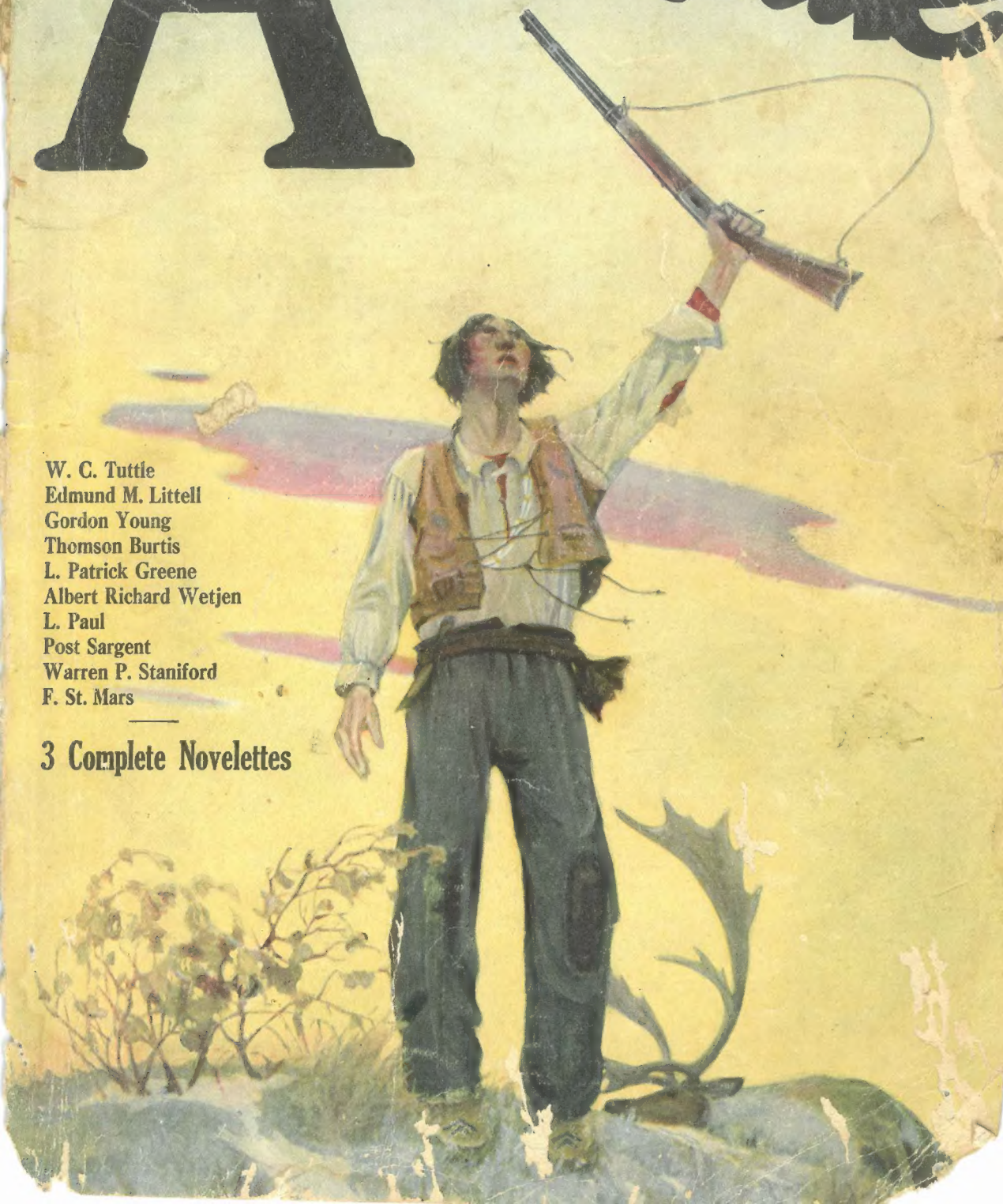

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Volume 56
Number 6

Come on—help!

I've been writing this Mennen Column for twelve years—with an average of thirty thousand miles a year in Pullmans on the side. I'm not quitting, but I'm not too big to call for help. Pretty nearly every man whose mind hadn't hardened before I could work on him has tried Mennen Shaving Cream. It's no use to argue with a man who is convinced.

It will take a smarter writer than I am to add to the appreciation of a shaver who, after years of suffering, has known the deep, soothing joy of Mennen dermutation. You know dermutation is the laboratory name for what we regular guys refer to as a licked beard.

I can't, and I doubt if you can, express in words that thrill of victory when, for the first time, your mean, tough piano-wire bristles quit like a dog—just naturally collapsed so that about all a razor had to do was to wipe off the wilted stubble.

But here is my proposition: I want the shavers of America to help write my stuff.

At the bottom of this column, I ask a question. The best answer to that question wins a splendid traveling bag that you couldn't buy for $50.

I want quick action—this contest closes February 15. I'm the judge. Contest open to all. No strings or conditions except that answers are limited to 100 words. Winning answer will be published as soon as I can pick it. If you don't win this contest, watch for another. I may run several of them. The bag's a beaut. I've never toted one as good. Hand made—big, classy and will last like the Mennen habit.

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January 30, 1926
Vol. LVI No. 6

Adventure

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy-four geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

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Headings . . . . . **R. Tandler**

Cover Design . . . . . **Colcord Heurlin**

One New Serial and Three Complete Novelettes

"YOU must choose, Cæsar. Rome is mad and masterless. Gaul is fretting on the verge of revolt. Go you, then, to invite the swords of Britain?" Thus spoke *Tros* of Samothrace. "THE MESSENGER OF DESTINY," a three-part story by Talbot Mundy, will begin in the next issue.

"THE wine of thirty years ago was heady," wrote the old captain, "so when the Duke, your father, struck me I drew my sword—even though he was garbed as a monk." "STATE PAPER" is a complete novelette of the Italian Renaissance, by F. R. Buckley, in the next issue.

FROM the icy wastes of Alaska to the fever-laden jungles of Mexico, *Clem* and *Matt* wandered in search of gold—or so they thought. "HARD ROCK MEN," a complete novelette by Will Levington Comfort, will appear in the next issue.

"*SILKY*" *MANDELL*, chief radioman on the U. S. S. *Rapaho*, found he had to get an electrician or lose his stripes. Then he thought of *Baboon*. "TLICK LATS," a complete novelette by Charles Victor Fischer, will appear in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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Adventure

January 30, 1926
Vol. LVI No. 6

Vanishing Brands

A Complete Novelette

by

W. C. Tuttle

Author of "The Tin God of Twisted River," "Hidden Blood," etc.

"Old Bill Green was a nice old man,
As nice as any man could be-e-e-e.
He only swore when he got mad,
Which showed he had pi-e-tee-e-e.
He-e-e only et when he got hungry
And slept when he had to ya-a-wn;
But he stole four horses, cause he felt like stealin',
And they hung him in the da-a-awn.
O-o-o-oh, they hung Bill Green in the dawnin',
For his crime he then did pa-a-ay.
'Twas a little early, but they only had a well-rope,
And this was their wash da-a-ay."

"HASHKNIFE" HARTLEY leaned back in his chair, his long nose pointed toward the ceiling, while his unmusical voice, quavering with deep feeling, unburdened his soul of song.

"Sleepy" Stevens, his partner, also tilted against the wall, considered Hashknife gravely. The partly-bald, gray-haired man at the desk grinned widely and reached for his pipe. He was the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association of Wyoming, and an old friend of the two cowboys.

"How's that for a song?" asked Hashknife.

"All right." The secretary smiled as he filled his pipe.

"All right!" snorted Hashknife indignantly. "That's the best song you ever heard, old-timer. I learned that in California."

"Where everythin' is the best," said Sleepy. "When it rains they're plumb astonished and when it don't rain they say it's unusual. If it gets hotter than —— they'll tell yuh that it ain't been that hot since they built the Tehachapi mountains."

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"Didn't like it down there, eh?" smiled the secretary.

"Didn't he?" Hashknife grinned widely. "He come danged near fallin' in love with a half-breed girl, Jim. Seen-yuh-reetas, they call 'em. I come danged near learnin' to talk Spanish down there."

"Never come danged near fallin' in no love," declared Sleepy indignantly, if ungrammatically.

The secretary laughed and leaned back in his swivel chair. He knew that these two men bickered continually, and at times, to one who did not understand them, it might seem that they were on the verge of coming to blows.

"Well," he said, "I am glad to see you boys back here again in Wyoming. I was thinking about you the other day and wondering if you'd ever come back." He drew a sheaf of papers out of a desk-drawer and began looking through them.

Sleepy tilted forward and got to his feet.

"C'mon, Hashknife!" he exclaimed nervously. "I told yuh we ought to keep away from Jim Stilwell. Yuh never can just visit him, dang his hide. C'mon, I tell yuh. Hit the grit before he finds what he's lookin' for."

The secretary gave Sleepy a reproving glance, but continued to look through the papers, until he selected one and threw the rest back on the desk. Sleepy groaned and slumped back in his chair.

"We are lost, the captain shouted, as he staggered down the stairs," grinned Hashknife.

"Yeah, and you set here and let him hoodle yuh into—"

"Nobody is going to hoodle you, Sleepy," declared the secretary.

"Hurrah!" said Sleepy hoarsely. "Three cheers and a bob-cat!"

"Been gettin' some bad news?" asked Hashknife, reaching for the makings of a cigaret.

"It's a bad situation," said the secretary seriously.

Sleepy groaned and shook his head.

"I told yuh so, Hashknife. I told yuh we ought to keep away from here. Mebbe some day you'll listen to me. Bad situation, he says. Don't listen to him. Git him to tell yuh about the time he went swimmin' in Salt Lake."

"That's rather an old story, Sleepy," said the secretary.

"I like 'em old. Git yore mind off that bad situation until me and Hashknife are out of sight, will yuh, Jim? Please. Dang yore hide, I only beg once."

"All right." The secretary tossed the paper with the others and relighted his pipe. "It wasn't much of a case, anyway, Sleepy. There were a few peculiar things about it. I had a man up there for two months—a darned good man—but he quit the case. They got on to him and sent a warning for him to vamoose."

"They got on to him?" queried Hashknife interested.

"The horse thieves," explained the secretary.

"Oh, yeah." Thus Sleepy thoughtfully. "The horse thieves got on to him and chased him out of the country. They would do that, I s'pose. Didn't like to associate with a detective, eh? Well, there's things that even a horse thief won't stand for."

"It's kind of a queer proposition," continued the secretary, ignoring Sleepy. "There's two outfits which have been losing horses for a long time. The sheriff's office don't seem able to stop it. The horses just disappear, it seems.

"We've known of it for quite a while. In fact, we call it the 'Case of the Vanishing Brands.' I don't know how many horses have been stolen. Both of these outfits are horse raisers, and they've bred some pretty good stock—runnin' horses and stuff like that. One outfit sold a lot of stuff to the U. S. cavalry."

"And you thought we'd go up there and get a letter from them horse thieves, eh?" grinned Sleepy. "But yo're wrong, Jimmy. Me and Hashknife are all through with that kind of thing; *sabe?* No more shall the war-cry sever, and so forth. Yore oration and ca-jollery falls upon plugged ears, thank gosh."

"All right, Sleepy. So you've sworn off fighting range battles, have you?"

"Uh-huh," Hashknife nodded slowly. "It's time we did, Jim. Life ought to give us somethin' better than gun-fightin'. Neither one of us are as young as we used to be, and time shore does slow a man up. We might be able to keep goin' a while longer, but what's the use?

"Sooner or later they'll get us. We've done our share, Jim. If we want to settle down and enjoy life, we ought to be allowed that much, hadn't we?"

"You must be almost forty, Hashknife," said the secretary.

"Yeah, I sure am. Sleepy is crowdin' me close. Of course we ain't in what you'd call the sere and yaller leaf, but just the same, we ain't as spry as we used to be."

"But you're not going to quit the range country, are you?"

"NO, WE'RE not goin' to quit it, Jim. Me and Sleepy have put away a few thousand dollars. Our life ain't been profitable, but we've got a few dollars, and we aim to buy a little ranch somewhere in the hills and raise a few cows for ourselves."

"Where do you want to buy, Hashknife?"

"We don't know. Of course it can't be no big outfit, Jim. We aim to kinda grow up with the cows, as yuh might say. Yuh don't know of a good place, do yuh?"

"I was just wondering if I did."

The secretary took some letters from his desk and looked them over carefully. Finally he found the one he had been looking for.

"Do you know anything about the country up near Little Powder River? Crazy Man Creek and the Wild Horse range?"

Hashknife shook his head thoughtfully.

"I've heard of such a place, Jim, thasall."

"Well, I don't know much about it myself. It's about forty or fifty miles from the Montana border. Pretty good range in there, I guess, but not much civilization. You can go to Roper by train and take a stage from there to Greener."

The secretary unrolled a wall-map of the state and pointed out the location.

"There's Greener. This ranch isn't more than ten miles from the town, I believe."

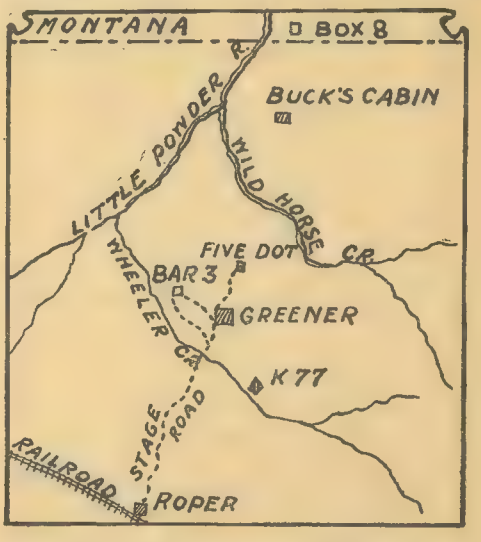
"You ain't spoke much about the ranch," reminded Sleepy.

"I can't tell you much, Sleepy. It is owned by an old man by the name of Walker. He's been there quite a while, I understand, and wants to sell out. He says it won't take much money, but doesn't say how much."

"Sounds interesting," agreed Hashknife, squinting at the map. "We've never been up there, Sleepy. It might just be the place we're lookin' for. Looks like a big range."

"It sure does," agreed the secretary. "Very few settlers up there. It isn't just the place that a nester would string his wire, and still it's close enough to bring stock out to a shipping point. Of course, I don't know any more about it than you do, but it was the one place that I knew was for sale."

The talk drifted to stock prices, the state of the range and other things of common interest, but the secretary made no further



mention of the Vanishing Brand case. Several times during the conversation Hashknife looked wistfully toward the pile of papers on the desk-top, and the secretary smiled to himself.

He had known Hashknife and Sleepy for several years, and he knew that this was the seventh or eighth time that they had decided to quit their adventurous career, buy a little ranch and settle down for life.

They were both top-hand cowboys, and there would be a welcome for them on dozens of big cattle ranches, but fate seemed to persist in throwing them into trouble. Wherever they went they ran into range troubles which needed their immediate attention.

Hashknife was well over six feet in height, and so slender that he seemed nearer seven feet, with a hatchet-face, long, thin nose, generous mouth and a pair of wistful gray eyes, which might harden to the color of cold steel in a moment.

Sleepy was of medium height, with a face filled with grin-wrinkles, which belied his pessimistic attitude. He was always ready for argument. In fact, he reveled in argument, whether he knew he was right or wrong. Sleepy did not have a deductive mind. He left that part of it to Hashknife, who had an uncanny ability to pick up

broken threads and weave them into a rope that would hog-tie the guilty.

Neither of them avoided trouble. There was nothing marvelous in their ability with a six-shooter; but good luck had brought them out of many gun battles with nothing worse than a superficial wound.

And the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association knew that both of them, in spite of their attitude, were itching to know more about the Vanishing Brand case. But they asked no more questions regarding it.

"Think you'll go up to Greener?" he asked as they picked up their hats.

"I dunno," Hashknife twisted his hat thoughtfully. "Mebbe it might be worth while." He held out his hand. "So long, Jim. If we take that place, I'll write yuh a line."

"I think you're a liar," grinned the secretary. "You never wrote a letter to anybody, Hashknife. Anyway, I'd like to hear from you two wanderers."

The three men shook hands soberly and the secretary watched them walk down the hallway to the stairs. He grinned softly and went back to his desk, where he put away his papers and filled his pipe.

Hashknife and Sleepy halted at the street and looked at each other.

"Well," said Hashknife seriously. "Yuh might at least let him tell us all about it."

"Yeah?" Sleepy grew indignant immediately. "How many times have we swore that—"

"Yeah, I know that. Vanishin' Brands. Hm-m-m. Well, how about takin' a look into that Greener country? That wide open range idea looks good to me, Sleepy."

"I think so," mused Sleepy. "Suppose we go to the depot and find out what the fare is up to that Roper place. We've got to go somewhere. Them vanishin' horses don't interest me none. By golly, we're goin' to stick to our agreement. Dang Jim Stilwell! He's got an idea of makin' a detective out of us, that's what he's got."

"Horses don't vanish," declared Hashknife. "They jist don't fade away. And them horse thieves sent the detective a notice to vacate. Yuh got to agree—"

"Yeah, I'll agree that we won't have nothin' to do with it. Me and you have hung up our six-guns; *sabe?* C'mon, you danged idjit!"

"All right. But jist the same, Sleepy, they don't vanish."

"That's fine. I hope for the horses' sake that they don't. And I sure hope that this old man Walker will sell cheap. I'm honin' for a chance to raise cowlets. I want a place where I can shove my boots under the table and tell folks that I'm home."

"I hate a horse thief," said Hashknife thoughtfully.

"Aw-w-w ——!" snorted Sleepy. "C'mon."

IT WAS six days later, about three o'clock in the afternoon, that the Roper stage came in to Greener and stopped at the little stage station. Amos Kemp, the long-faced driver, jumped down from his seat and nervously assisted two ladies and one man to descend.

The man was George Hale Hunter, owner of the Five-Dot ranch, and a well known financier of the Pacific Coast. The two ladies were his wife and daughter, who had accompanied him from their home at Sacramento to sojourn a few weeks at the ranch.

Hunter was a big man physically, with a blocky, stern-lined face, hard blue eyes and a severe jaw. His wife was a well dressed, refined looking woman of about fifty years of age, and the daughter, Catherine, was a well-formed, sweet-faced girl of twenty.

Hunter snapped an order to the stage-driver, who immediately unstrapped their baggage from the boot and placed it on the wooden sidewalk. Several people had gathered around the office, and it did not take Hunter long to tell them that the stage had been held up by two men, and that these two men had stripped himself and his family of everything on their persons.

"I don't know, and I don't care a ——!" he blurted inelegantly, when some one inquired where said holdup had occurred. "They got what they came after, and I hope they're satisfied."

Amos Kemp had little to say until the Hunter family was located in the Greener hotel, and he was backed against the bar in the Wild Horse saloon, surrounded by interested inhabitants of Greener.

"It happened down at Wheeler Creek," he told them. "Right where yuh make that turn before crossin' the creek. By jing, I never suspicioned a thing until my team stopped. There was a man on each side of the road, pointin' Winchesters at me.

"One of 'em says, 'Jist keep hangin' on to

yore lines with both hands, driver.' I told 'em that I had been hired to drive the team—not to fight—and it kinda tickled one of 'em.

"The feller on the left hand side eases up to the stage and politely tells Mister Hunter and family to ooze outside and pay toll. Them two women was sure scared all holler, but the old man wasn't so scared. He's been buckin' Wall Street too long to get scared of a ordinary holdup man, I reckon." Amos laughed loudly at his own wit.

"Well, did they get much money?" asked a man.

"I'll betcha they did. Old man Hunter had a roll that would choke a horse, and they took it cheerfully. Them two women was wearin' some diamonds and things like that; so them things was added to the pot.

"I dunno how much it would amount to, but Hunter swore that it would cost him five thousand to replace them pieces of jewelry; and I'm bettin' that Hunter had that much in his roll. He paid their fare off that roll, and all I could see was hundred-dollar bills."

"You got a good look at 'em, didn't yuh, Amos?" asked a man.

"Yeah, I shore did. And all the way in I've been tryin' to remember what they looked like. They wasn't gaudy enough in their clothes for me to remember that part of it. They had masks on their faces and guns in their hands."

"Didja ever see either of 'em before?" asked the bartender.

Amos squinted thoughtfully.

"I dunno. Lemme tell yuh somethin'. Yesterday two men came to Roper on the train. By their looks, they're cowpunchers. I heard somebody say that they was on their way to Greener, and I had an idea that I might sell 'em a ride; but they bought two horses from Clint Evans, and Clint told me that they brought saddles with 'em.

"I seen 'em both this mornin' about nine o'clock, and they had the horses tied to a hitch-rack. A little later on these horses are gone, and I didn't see the two fellers again. I asked around about 'em, 'cause I know danged well they're strangers in this country, but nobody seems to know where they went."

"You'd know 'em again?" asked the bartender.

"Oh, sure."

"How about the description of the holdup men, Amos?"

"I'm still wonderin'," admitted Amos. "They took the money-box off the stage, but there wasn't anythin' in it. Then they jist kinda faded off into the brush and we came on. Hunter shore is mad. He rode outside with me the rest of the way, so he could swear all he wanted to."

And Amos Kemp was perfectly right when he said that George Hunter was mad. Hunter had an exalted idea of his own importance, and it rasped his soul to think that he had been robbed in a country where he owned more property than any other man.

He was also angry at not finding transportation to the Five-Dot ranch, which was six miles northeast of Greener. After fuming and fussing for an hour or so he went to the livery-stable, hired a two-seated buggy, team and driver, bundled his family into the rented vehicle and headed for the ranch.

The driver tried to strike up a conversation with Hunter, but to no avail. They bumped over the rutty road behind a pair of half broken horses, clinging desperately to their seats, while the driver, knowing that Mrs. Hunter and the daughter were strangers, tried to point out the interesting spots along the way.

"Jist beyond here is where they hanged Jules McMillan," he told them. "Cottonwood tree at the left. If yuh look close you can see where the rope burnt deep into the green limb.

"Jules was a nice feller. Made as nice a-lookin' corpse as yuh ever seen. I felt kinda sorry for Jules. Yuh see, they hung him for horse stealin'. He tried to argue them out of it, but they'd kinda made up their minds. Next day they found out that Jules wasn't guilty; so they passed a resolution to the effect that they was kinda hasty in the matter, but that it was all right, 'cause they'd have to hang him sooner or later.

"I heard that you folks got held up today. Yeah, that's shore liable to happen any old time. Prob'ly some of the boys got hard up for spendin' money. Uh-huh, that's prob'ly it. Feller hadn't ort to hold that agin' a man. It ain't no worse than skinnin' a man in a trade. Kinda bumpy, ain't it?"

THEY drove in at the big gate of the Five-Dot, and drew up at the wide veranda. The Five-Dot ranch-house was a big, two-story affair in the center, but angling out on both sides with one-story additions. A wide

veranda had been built around the front and half way down one side. Two giant cottonwoods almost covered the front of the house, and the third one grew at the rear, offering a shade for the kitchen and dining-room.

To the south of the ranch-house was a long one-story bunk-house, and to the east were the stables, feeding sheds and corrals. The Five-Dot was a horse ranch. Hunter, while not exactly a horse fancier, felt that there was more money to be made in horses than in cattle; so he raised horses.

There was already a slight demand for polo ponies in the east, and the tough little, short-coupled cow-ponies had already found favor. He bred a few of the "work-horse" breeds, for which there was a ready market in the farming country; but the bulk of his herds were riding and driving stock.

As they started to unload their baggage, a short, squinty-eyed person, with an enormous chew of tobacco bulging his cheek and a limp in one leg, came out of the house. He stared at the arrivals, squinting thoughtfully.

"Hello, 'Silver Linin'," greeted the driver.

"'Lo," Silver Lining Lofbaugh, the Five-Dot cook, spat accurately through a hole in the veranda railing, and grinned widely.

"Where are the rest of the boys, Lofbaugh?" asked Hunter.

"The rest of 'em? Lemme see. Lynn Coulter and Pete Falls is down at the bunk-house, prob'ly playin' two-handed poker, though I ain't sayin' they are. Mebbe it's pitch, I dunno. Jimmy Ashlock and 'Army' Bean ain't back yet. They went over to the K77 this mornin' t' look at a couple of pinto broncs that Lynn thought might be circus stock."

"Call Coulter," ordered Hunter. "Never mind the grips. Let's go inside. Send Coulter to me, Lofbaugh."

Silver Lining chewed reflectively and watched the Hunter family disappear into the house. He squinted at the driver and walked down closer to him, lowering his voice.

"Whereabouts in —— did they come from?" he asked.

"Came in on the stage today from Roper."

"Yeah? Hm-m-m. Kinda snuck in on us, eh? My gees, and I'll have to cook for that aggregation for a month, I s'pose. 'S bad enough to have George Hunter around here, but when he brings his female contraptions—my gees!

"Girl's kinda good lookin'. Hope she stays close t' home. If these Wild Horse punchers get a look at her, I'll have so darned many of 'em around here that it'll look like a roundup. My gees, I'd hate t' be Lynn Coulter, I would. My gees!"

Silver Lining limped down to the bunk-house, where he kicked the door open with his good foot and broke up a two-handed game of seven-up when he blurted out the news.

Lynn Coulter was a well built cowboy, about thirty years of age, with a cynically handsome face and a mop of wavy brown hair. He had been foreman of the Five-Dot for two years, and had shown himself to be capable.

Coulter knew horses; knew how to breed, break or ride them. He was able to do everything well, it seemed. He was better educated than the average cowboy, wore his clothes better, used proper English at times.

Pete Falls was a bony-faced, emaciated cowboy, with buck-teeth and watery eyes. As a cowboy he rated high in the range, but of education he had none. It was hinted that Falls was a gunman, but no one in the Wild Horse country had ever seen him in action.

Coulter laughed at Silver Lining and shook his head.

"Now is the winter of our discontent," he quoted humorously. "I wonder what brings the Old Man here this time?"

"Good lookin' filly," offered Silver Lining.

"Who—the girl?"

"Uh-huh. Got good lines, good color and kind eyes. Teeth good, color kinda chestnut. Steps well. Dam walks like she'd been wintered in a hard pasture. Sire raisin' —— up there, and wants yuh pronto."

"Mebbe I better go," grinned Lynn.

"I'm —— glad yo're foreman and not me," declared Pete. "If yuh tell him about losin' them five sorrels he was goin' to ship to Philly-del-fee, he'll massacree yuh."

"Well," laughed Lynn, "I'll have to tell him."

Silver Lining walked back to the house with Lynn, and they met Hunter on the veranda. Hunter lost no time and used no uncertain language when he told Silver Lining to get to —— into the house and clean up two of the upper bedrooms.

"My ——, it's a disgrace to let a house get in this condition," declared the owner. "And that kitchen is a crime. If you can't

keep this place clean, I'll hire a cook that will."

"You jist hop to it," offered Silver Lining.

He was the best cook in the country, and would have no difficulty in securing a new job.

"Go ahead, Silver," urged Lynn. "Hunter didn't mean nothing."

"Didn't I?" queried the exasperated Hunter. "I meant just what I said."

"Convention's deadlocked," grinned Silver Lining, and sat down to enjoy the debate. "Nobody has to fire me, by gees. I've left a trail of well fed customers from here to Dawson City, and I sure don't have to take lip from no ——ed millionaire."

Hunter flushed angrily, as he looked at the grinning cook. He was about to reply, when Lynn stopped him with—

"This is hardly fair, Hunter. Silver Lining is the best cook in the country, and it isn't fair for you to drop in here and jump all over him like this. If you had let me know that you were coming I would have had things ready for you and your family."

"Let you know we were coming? ——it, I wrote you last week."

Lynn shook his head.

"I never got it. You don't suppose we'd let you hire a livery-rig to drive out here if we knew you were coming?"

"Well, I wrote," growled Hunter. "I got your letter ten days ago; so I made up my mind to come right out."

"I see," Lynn squinted thoughtfully at Silver Lining, and made an almost imperceptible motion toward the door with his head.

Silver Lining got to his feet, hitched up his overalls and limped slowly to the door, where he turned.

"You better tell yore wimmin folks to vacate upstairs, until I finish, Hunter. When I git to throwin' suds, it's a case of sink or swim."

"You might explain it to them," said Hunter coldly.

Silver Lining spat violently and shook his head.

"Not me! I'm particular about speakin' to folks that I ain't never been introduced to, by gees. Feller never knows."

"Swamp out the kitchen first," grinned Lynn.

"Aw right."

HUNTER turned to Lynn and they walked to the upper end of the veranda.

"I came out here to try and stop this horse stealing," said Hunter. "By ——, I won't stand for it any longer. If the county officers and the Cattlemen's Association can't stop it, it is time for me to see what I can do."

Lynn turned his head and looked down across the hills, an amused expression in his eyes.

"I suppose you're right," he said slowly, trying to keep the laughter out of his voice. "Perhaps you can do it. One never knows." He turned and looked at Hunter. "I've got more bad news for you. Since I wrote you last we have lost those five sorrel ponies you were going to ship east."

"What! Those polo ponies?"

"Yeah. Faded out together," Lynn lapsed into rangeland dialect. "Somebody picked themselves a nice sorrel bouquet."

"Are you sure they are gone, Coulter?"

"They were in the corral at night, and the next morning they were gone."

"Well, great heavens! Was there no trace—"

"How could yuh get a trace? Did yuh think that our horses wear a distinguishing mark on their hoofs?" Lynn shrugged his shoulders and began rolling a cigaret.

Hunter paced the length of the veranda, frowning angrily. He had expected big things of those sorrels. They were of the same age, size and color, and were to have graced the stables of one of Hunter's personal friends.

"How about setting a trap for the thieves?" he asked, coming back to Lynn. "Put some horses in a corral and lay for 'em."

"That was the sheriff's idea," smiled Lynn. "We put seven horses in the corral at Crazy Man Flats, and the sheriff and two deputies laid out there for five nights. They got tired of it; so me and Pete Falls tried it. The night we spent up there was the night they stole the sorrels from the corral here."

Hunter snorted with indignation.

"Fooled you, eh? They knew all the time that the sheriff was waiting for 'em. I suppose they are laughing at you, too."

"What I don't know won't hurt me," said Lynn seriously.

"What I know hurts me," admitted

Hunter. "This has cost me a lot of money, Coulter. But the money isn't the main thing that hurts. We were held up today, down below Greener. Two masked men stopped the stage. They took all my money and all the jewelry my wife and daughter were wearing."

"For the love of gosh!" exclaimed Lynn. "That's the first holdup in a long time. Did yuh get a good look at 'em?"

"At the muzzles of their guns," said Hunter angrily. "They knew their business all right."

"No way to describe them?"

"No. Masked faces, overalls, black hats, blue, black or brown shirts."

"How about their sizes?"

"Pshaw!" Hunter shrugged his shoulders. "With the muzzle of a Winchester looking you between the eyes, how could you take time to draw a mental picture of the man behind it. I'll tell you honestly, Coulter; I don't know whether they were tall, short or medium. But I do know that they took a lot of money away from us."

Coulter nodded slowly.

"I suppose it is hard to describe a man in a case of that kind. You were foolish to have a lot of money with you."

"I always carry cash with me. I intended to look over some horses at the K77, and I know that any one would rather have the cash than a check."

"I suppose so," agreed Coulter. "How long will you be here?"

"That's hard to say. I'm going to stay until I get a line on where my horses are going. What kind of men are Ashlock and Bean?"

"All right. Good punchers. Of course, both of them have had a lot more experience with cattle than with horses, but they're all right."

"What became of Buck Keen and Larry Elkins?"

Keen and Elkins were former employes of the Five-Dot, but had not shown proper respect for their employer, who had fired them much in the same manner in which he had started to fire Silver Lining, except that Keen and Elkins told him what they thought of him and rode away. This was about eight months before.

"I heard that Buck was working for the TR outfit north of here," said Lynn. "Somebody said he was. Larry is up near the Montana line, I think. They never came back to the Wild Horse country. Good men, both of 'em."

"I didn't like them."

"Well, that was all right," smiled Lynn. "You're the boss, and don't have to break in new men. But I'm satisfied. Bean and Ashlock suit me fine. They ought to be back pretty soon. You better kinda get settled, because Silver Lining will have supper pretty soon."

"I suppose so." Hunter nodded quickly. "Come in and meet the rest of my family, Coulter. This is their first visit to a ranch, and you'll have to help me entertain them."

"I'm not what you'd call an entertainer," laughed Lynn. "I'll do my best."

AND about the time that the Hunter family was leaving Greener for the Five-Dot ranch, Hashknife and Sleepy were sitting on their horses, looking over the Bar-3 ranch, getting almost a bird's-eye view of the place from the point of a high butte.

At the town of Roper they had inquired about the Walker ranch, and their informant had told them how to reach it without going first to Greener. An old road branched about a mile south of Greener, which intersected with the road from town to Walker's Bar-3 ranch.

It was located in a little valley, studded with clumps of trees, and watered from a fork of Wheeler Creek. The house and stable were almost hidden in the cottonwoods, and they could see the sparkle of water from the little stream which passed close to the house.

"It sure looks homelike," commented Hashknife. "That little valley is a dinger, Sleepy. I can almost see me and you livin' out our life down there in the shade of them trees. I'd like to raise some bees and a little patch of clover for 'em to feed on."

"Dream on, Car'line," grinned Sleepy. "I'll betcha yuh can get stung in this country without raisin' stingers. Here comes some of the natives."

Hashknife turned in his saddle, as two riders topped the hill behind them. They were well mounted. One was a blond-haired youth of about twenty-one, with a reckless eye and a thin-lipped mouth. The other was older, hawk-faced, slightly gray at the temples and with a gray stubble on

his jaw. Both riders had rifles in scabbards under their right knees.

They looked keenly at Hashknife and Sleepy as they rode up.

"Howdy, gents," greeted Hashknife. They nodded shortly.

"Is that Walker's ranch down there?" asked Hashknife.

The younger man nodded.

"Yeah, that's Walker's ranch."

"Much obliged."

The two men started to ride on, but the younger drew up his mount and looked back.

"Was you lookin' for the Walker ranch?" he asked.

"Until I found it," grinned Hashknife.

"My name's Walker."

"Yeah? Well, that's fine. We'll ride down with yuh." They shook up their horses and started down the grade.

"You ain't the Walker I was lookin' for," said Hashknife.

"Probably my dad," offered the young man. "Folks call him 'Dad,' mostly."

"Prob'ly," nodded Hashknife. "How's everythin' on this range?"

"Well," young Walker glanced sharply at Hashknife, "about the same as usual."

"Uh-huh," Hashknife wondered what that meant.

"What did you want to see dad about?"

"Just a little personal matter."

"Oh! Ever been here before?"

"Nope. Just rode in from Roper this mornin'."

"Got yore horses from Clint Evans in Roper, eh?"—thus the older companion of Walker. "Both branded Diamond E."

"Yeah, we did," admitted Hashknife. "Pretty good broncs. You seem familiar with horse brands around here."

"Ort to be—this is a horse country."

"Yea-a-ah?" Hashknife squinted at Sleepy, whose mouth had assumed a circle, expressing a silent "O".

"Horse country, eh?" mused Hashknife aloud.

Young Walker did not reply, but Hashknife saw him shoot a quick glance at his companion. They rode in at the ranch-house and found Dad Walker gentling a colt in the corral. He shaded his eyes from the sun as he looked at the two strangers, and walked over to them inquiringly.

DAD WALKER was a man of about sixty years of age, with a weather-beaten face, stubby mustache and snow-white beard. He was of medium height, but stooped slightly. His eyes were almost cobalt-blue and surrounded with a network of fine wrinkles.

"Howdy," he said pleasantly, looking from Hashknife to Sleepy.

Hashknife dismounted and held out his hand.

"Howdy, Mr. Walker. My name is Hartley."

"Hartley? Uh-huh. P l e a s e d to meetcha."

"Meet Sleepy Stevens, Mr. Walker."

Sleepy dismounted and shook hands with the old man, who turned to his son and the other man, who was introduced at Mr. Hedges.

"Name's 'Frosty,' " said the man grinning. "Glad to meetcha both."

Dean Walker, the son, and Frosty Hedges went down to the corral, leading their horses, while Dad Walker invited Hashknife and Sleepy up to the house. They tied their horses to a corner of the porch, and were introduced to Mrs. Walker, who was sewing in the shade.

"Call her 'Ma'," said Dad Walker. "Everybody calls her that."

"I'm just Ma," smiled the little gray-haired lady. "Didn't Dean and Frosty ride in with you?"

"Yeah, we met 'em at the top of the hills, ma'am," said Hashknife.

"Not 'ma'am'," said Mrs. Walker.

"All right, Ma," grinned Hashknife, as he sat down on a corner of the steps and produced his cigaret makings. "Yuh don't mind if I smoke, do yuh, Ma?"

"Lord o' love—no! Everybody smokes around here. I'll betcha I'm so steeped in tobacco smoke that I'd pine away if you'd take it away from here."

"Is this yore first trip into this country?" asked Dad.

"Yeah, it is, Dad," replied Hashknife. "I kinda like the looks of it. There ain't too many wire fences, no nesters and no sheep."

"No, we've never been bothered with sheep."

"This sure is a cozy little ranch," said Hashknife. "We was admirin' it from the top of the hill. You lived here long?"

"Dean was six when we came," said Ma Walker softly.

"And he's twenty-two now," offered Dad.

There was a silence period for a full minute. Then—

"You aimin' to locate around here?" asked Ma.

"That all depends," Hashknife inhaled deeply and shifted to a more comfortable position. "We're kinda lookin' around. Me and Sleepy are in the market for a little ranch, and we heard that this one was for sale."

"Well," Dad Walker looked sidewise at his wife and shifted his gaze quickly when she looked up at him. "I dunno about that, Hartley. Yuh see, we've lived here a long time. It has been a hard struggle to make any money out of it for the past year. Jim Stilwell told you what was going on, didn't he?"

"Jim Stilwell!" Hashknife choked on his smoke and blinked at Sleepy, whose eyes and mouth were wide open.

"I got a letter from him yesterday," continued Dad. "He said you'd probably be up this way soon."

"The slick son-of-a-gun!" exploded Sleepy.

"He—he kinda outsmarted us," muttered Hashknife, but his eyes twinkled at Stilwell's scheme to throw them into the case without their knowledge.

"I don't understand," said Dad questioningly.

"Never mind," laughed Hashknife. "Jim Stilwell did."

"Yeah, and it makes you happy." Sleepy growled his disgust. "Next time I see Jim Stilwell I'm shore goin' to curry him a-plenty."

"Jim is a nice boy," said Ma Walker. "We've known him a long time."

"He's sure a reliable feller," nodded Dad.

"I like him, too," Hashknife grinned at Sleepy.

"All right," grunted Sleepy. "Let's make it a lovin' party and all speak well of the danged slicker. Jusasame, I'll tell him a few things next time we meet."

"He spoke well of you," Dad Walker grinned behind his hand. "Said a lot of nice things about yuh both. He said that there was only one man in the State that was smarter than you two, and that was himself."

"Yeah, he'd say that," declared Sleepy. "He'd prob'ly mean it, too. I suppose he's cooped up in his danged office, laughin' at us, and wonderin' what we said when we found out. Why, dang his hide, he said he didn't know anythin', except that you wanted to sell out. Acted like you was a perfect stranger to him."

Dad Walker laughed as he filled his pipe.

"Well, it was true that I told Jim this ranch was for sale. We never were big horse raisers; not like the Five-Dot and the K77. We've made a good living up to the time that our horses began to disappear, but since then we've gradually gone broke.

"Without exaggeration, we've lost a hundred head of horses in less than one year; horses that would bring us on an average of over one hundred dollars a head. The Five-Dot has lost more than we have. And nobody has been able to find where they have gone. Jim Stilwell sent a first class cattle detective here, but he failed to find out a single thing. Finally he was warned to leave the country. Knowing these things, I don't suppose you would care to buy."

"Well, it does kinda cloud up the issue," smiled Hashknife.

"Certainly does. The sheriff and his deputies have done everything possible, it seems, and the ranch owners have tried in every way to discover the guilty parties. Speakin' confidentially, Hartley, they've just about broke me. Dean and Frosty have just come back from a seventy-mile swing, looking for clues, but I know they have failed."

"Prob'ly," Hashknife nodded thoughtfully. "Awful hard to put the deadwood on a smart gang like that. Say, don't a feller named Hunter own the Five-Dot?"

"Yes. George Hunter. Lives in Sacramento, California."

"Came in on the stage today from Roper, I think. Two ladies with him, and I reckon it was his wife and daughter."

"Yeah?" It did not seem to interest Dad. "Probably rairin' over his losses and came in to find out about 'em."

"You spoke about the K77 outfit," reminded Hashknife, tearing a cigaret paper out of his book and hanging it to his lower-lip, while he fumbled for his tobacco. "Have they lost many horses?"

Dad Walker shook his head quickly.

"No, they haven't lost any, Hartley. At least, they hadn't, the last time I talked

with 'Egg' Flannigan. He's the foreman."

"Funny name," grinned Sleepy.

Ma Walker laughed and looked up from her sewing.

"He got it in a funny way, too. The sheriff, Mike Larkin, is a person who will bet on anything, and he and Egg were none too friendly. They got to arguing one day over their respective ability to do clever things.

"Egg declared that he could throw an egg from a distance of ten feet, hit a man on the head with it and not break the egg. The sheriff swore that it couldn't be done, unless there was a trick in it.

"Egg said it wasn't any trick, but it did take real skill. One word brought on another, and the sheriff bet Egg a dollar that he couldn't do it. Egg tried to reneg, but the sheriff bluffed him into making the bet, which was what Egg desired, because Egg already had framed it up with the bartender, who had the eggs.

"He threw the egg from ten feet away, hit the sheriff between the eyes with an egg that must have been laid in the Ark, paid his bet—and won himself a nickname. The two deputies refused to ride home with the sheriff."

Hashknife and Sleepy laughed roundly, and decided that this trick would be added to their repertoire, with slight variations.

"Don't it strike yuh kinda funny that the K77 ain't lost no horses?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah, it did, Hartley," admitted Dad. "It didn't look quite right, because the K77 have some mighty good stock; but there's nothin' to indicate that they have ever done any crooked work. Flannigan hires four cowpunchers. They're not the most moral crew in the world, but there's nothin' against 'em that I know about."

"What kind of a feller is the sheriff?"

"Fine. Mike won't never set the world on fire with his ideas, but he does his best. This is his second term. He worries a lot about this horse stealin', but don't seem to get anywhere. Ma, my insides tell me that it must be almost eatin' time."

"Not yet, Dad," she smiled. "It won't be supper time for an hour yet. You better show these boys where they can sleep."

"No, don't do that," objected Hashknife. "We'll mosey on to Greener and put up at a hotel."

"When we've got extra bunks?" queried Ma Walker. "I see you doin' that right now. Dad, you take 'em down to the stable and feed their broncs."

"But," Hashknife started to object.

"Mind Ma," grinned Dad. "Anyway there ain't a decent hotel in Greener, speakin' bed-bugically. C'mon."

"All right," Hashknife grinned widely. "I didn't have no idea of leavin' here, unless yuh run us off, Ma."

"We'll wait and see if you're afraid to eat," replied Ma. "We don't cater to hummin'-bird appetites at the Bar-3."

They untied their horses and led them down to the stable, where Frosty and Dean pointed out the stalls and helped them hang up their saddles. Frosty seemed interested in their rifles, but did not come right out and ask them why they carried this extra armament.

"We carry everythin' we own," smiled Hashknife. "Between us we've got one hundred and ten pieces of baggage."

"Hundred and ten?" queried Frosty incredulously. "Where do yuh figure that?"

"Two decks of cards, two pairs of socks and two rifles."

"Aw-huh," grinned Frosty. "That's right. Fifty-two cards in a deck. That's pretty good, by golly."

THE four men went back to the ranch-house porch, where they draped themselves in the shade.

"See nothin'?" asked Dad.

Dean shook his head.

"Stopped at the K77," offered Frosty. "Saw Egg Flannigan. Heard that the Five-Dot had lost more horses. Army Bean and Ashlock were over there, lookin' at a couple of painted ponies, and they said that the horse stealin' epidemic was still ragin'."

"Did they say anythin' about Hunter comin' to the ranch?" asked Dad.

"Nope. Is he?"

"I think he came in today," offered Hashknife. "Anyway, he was in Roper, and somebody said he was on his way to the ranch."

"Probably hop all over Lynn Coulter," grinned Dean. "That's about all Hunter is good for in the horse business—to jump on to his foreman."

"What kind of a feller is this Coulter?" asked Hashknife.

"Fine. Lynn is a regular feller," said Dean.

"Yes, he's all right," agreed Dad. "Lynn knows horses."

"And he's a fighter," added Frosty.

Hashknife smoked thoughtfully, squinting at his toes. Then:

"With all this horse stealin' goin' on, hasn't anybody ever been under suspicion? There must be somebody that might fit into that kind of a deal."

Dad shook his head quickly.

"No, there isn't, Hartley. Circulars have been sent into every range in the country, warnin' folks to look out for Bar-3 and Five Dot horses. The sheriffs of about all the counties in Wyoming and Montana have been on the watch; but they've seen nothin'."

Hashknife smoked slowly, his eyes half shut. Finally he rubbed the fire off his cigaret, tilted his hat down over one eye and squinted at Dad.

"Well," he said finally, "if it wasn't for the letter they sent to the detective, I'd say that ghosts were workin' in the Wild Horse range; but it seems to be a settled fact that ghosts don't do much writin'. Anyway," Hashknife grinned widely, "if it was ghosts, what in —— would they care for a detective?"

"That's a fact," said Dad seriously.

"And," continued Hashknife, "bein' as they're human bein's, they're bound to make a mistake sooner or later."

"They might," agreed Dad, but dubiously.

"Let's figure that they will, whatcha say?"

Sleepy groaned dismally.

"All right," he said wearily, when the others looked at him. "Fate usually causes these things, and yuh can't buck fate; but next time I see Jim Stilwell I'm sure goin' to play a fast tune on his heart-strings."

THE next morning Mike Larkin, the sheriff, and "Frenchy" O'Regan, one of his two deputies, rode in to Greener. Word of the stage holdup had been sent to them, and the sheriff lost no time in responding.

Larkin was a bullet-headed sort of person, with a wide mouth, square-cut nose and a mop of black hair, which sprouted low on his forehead. A jury of phrenologists would have convicted Larkin on most any kind of a criminal charge, because of his appearance; but he was well liked, capable, and had a sense of humor.

Frenchy O'Regan was above medium height, red-headed, and with a typically Celtic cast of countenance. His nickname was earned during an argument, in which he insisted that he was French, and that the correct pronunciation of his name was "Oregan," with a decided accent on "gan." Frenchy was also capable.

They invaded the Greener saloon and gambling house, where they gathered up all available information on the holdup. Some one suggested that they see Amos Kemp, the stage-driver, whom the sheriff had already interviewed.

Egg Flannigan rode in from the K77 and met the sheriff. Flannigan was a lean-faced, several generations removed son of Erin, whose love of show was almost aboriginal. The band on his expensive Stetson was silver-mounted; his shirt and muffler in contrasting shades of silk, and his stamped and trimmed chaps were of the exaggerated bat-wing type. He wore well fitted boots, with decorated tops, and his spurs might have been purchased from a jeweler.

Egg Flannigan was a riot of color and range-elegance, but no one laughed at his clothes, because Egg was a thoroughly capable cowpuncher and horseman—and no pacifist.

He swaggered into the Greener saloon and greeted the sheriff cordially. Larkin had long since forgiven Egg for the acquiring of a nickname at his expense.

"Here's the frog-eater, too," laughed Flannigan, offering his hand to Frenchy. "You fellers come back to catch the spook horse thieves? By golly, it's a wonder yuh didn't get pneumonia from layin' out in the cold at the Five-Dot corral."

Larkin grinned and shook his head.

"Not horse thieves this time, Egg. You heard about the holdup of the stage yesterday, didn't yuh?"

Flannigan hadn't, and he became very interested in the sheriff's story, which was the one told him by Amos Kemp.

"Two masked men, eh? Hm-m-m. Packin' rifles, didja say?"

Flannigan turned to the bartender and motioned every one to join him in liquid refreshments. He seemed seriously thoughtful, and the sheriff noticed this. They drank silently and Egg turned his back to the bar, resting his elbows on the bar-top.

"I didn't know that Hunter was back

here," he said musingly. "Jimmy Ashlock and Army Bean were at my place yesterday, but they didn't mention Hunter."

"I don't guess the Five-Dot knowed he was comin'—" said the bartender wisely. "Hunter hired a livery team to take 'em out to the ranch. 'Gabby' Grant drove the team."

"That accounts for the boys not mention'n' him," decided Flannigan. "Hunter kinda slipped in on 'em."

"I'd kinda slip in, too," declared Frenchy. "If I was losin' as many horses as he is, all —— couldn't drag me away. Lynn said that unless somethin' was done pretty quick, they wouldn't have enough horses left to drag the vehicles off the ranch; and they've only got a wagon, a buggy and a breakin'-cart."

"That's right," nodded Flannigan thoughtfully.

The sheriff squinted sidewise at Flannigan and decided to take the bull by the horns.

"Egg," he said softly, "did you see two men yesterday; two men, who were carryin' Winchester rifles?"

Flannigan looked quickly at him.

"What do yuh mean, Mike?"

"I need to know about two men, who packed rifles, Egg."

Flannigan frowned heavily for several moments. Then—

"Mike, I don't want to be the cause of sendin' two men to the penitentiary."

"Yuh won't—not necessarily, Egg. It might give me somethin' to work on, don'tcha see? They were strangers, anyway, wasn't they?"

"Strangers? No-o-o, I can't say they were."

"Uh-huh." The sheriff was more interested than before.

"What made yuh ask if they were strangers, Mike?"

"Just wonderin'."

Flannigan nodded toward the open door and the three men walked outside, away from the wide-open ears of the bartender.

"I'm not tellin' this to put anybody in bad," assured Flannigan.

"All right." The sheriff rested his elbows on top of the hitch-rack. "This don't mean convictin' anybody, Egg. But you'd be willin' to swear to this, wouldn't yuh?"

"To seein' 'em?"

"Yeah."

"Oh, sure. There were others there Mike. The two men were Dean Walker and Frosty Hedges."

The sheriff pursed his lips and shifted his position, while Frenchy squinted upward and scratched his chin violently.

"What time was this?" asked the sheriff.

"About two o'clock."

"Uh-huh. It's about four miles from the K77 to where the road crosses Wheeler Creek, ain't it? Plenty of time for anybody to ride from yore place to the crossin' in three-quarters of an hour. How long was they at yore place, Egg?"

"Ten minutes, mebbe."

"Still gives 'em time," mused the sheriff aloud.

"Now I don't want yuh to make 'em trouble on what I've said," stated Flannigan. "I don't suppose that either one of them boys ever had a thought to holdin' up the stage. Dean said that they had been circlin' the country, lookin' for what they might see. Naturally they'd carry rifles, which isn't anythin' out of the ordinary, Mike. I'm just tellin' you this, because you were lookin' for two men, who had rifles."

"I understand what yuh mean, Egg," nodded Larkin. "I've got to have more than that to make an arrest. Here comes Hunter now."

Hunter was driving a high-stepping bay, hitched to a top-buggy, and beside him sat Lynn Coulter. They stopped at the hitch-rack near the three men and tied their horse.

HUNTER was none too cordial in his handshake with the sheriff, and ignored Frenchy; merely nodding to Flannigan, who winked at Coulter, indicating in pantomime that he introduce Hunter to Frenchy, who had known Hunter for a number of years.

"Yuh saved me a trip out to the Five Dot, Hunter," said the sheriff. "I wanted yore version of that holdup, and a description of the robbers."

Hunter shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"I suppose you've heard all of it, Larkin. Sorry, but I'm unable to give you a description. Some day I hope we will have enough efficiency in this county to wipe out this horse stealing and robbery. It is getting so that an honest person is not safe to be abroad."

Mike Larkin squinted at the others and his lips twitched slightly as he said—

"You should have thought of that before yuh came abroad."

"Yes?" Hunter was inclined to be belligerent. "Your sarcasm falls just as flat as your puny endeavors to enforce the law."

Larkin looked him over coldly and his wide mouth drew to a straight line. Frenchy read the danger signs and put his hand on the sheriff's arm.

"Go easy, Mike," he warned. "You ought to know Hunter by this time."

"Ought to know me?" Hunter glared at Frenchy.

"Yeah—ought to know yuh," Frenchy was not afraid of Hunter. "You got a few dollars and they swelled yore head. You think yo're a shiny little tin god, Hunter, but yo're not—yo're just a plain, big-mouthed, —— fool."

"Go easy, Frenchy," warned Mike, which was handing back the advice.

Flannigan laughed quickly. Hunter looked at Coulter, as if expecting Coulter to assist him; but Coulter was merely stifling a grin and rolling a cigaret.

"All right!" snapped Hunter impotently, as he turned on his heel. "I'll remember that, O'Regan."

"That's fine," grinned Frenchy. "Yuh might try repeatin' it to yourself a couple times a day. Mebbe that'll help a little."

Hunter walked stiffly across the street to a store, and after a moment, Coulter grimaced at the other men and followed him. He was not at all in accord with his employer's attitude, and made little attempt to conceal it.

"He'll prob'ly fire Lynn," said Flannigan.

"No he won't," declared Frenchy. "Lynn is a good man, and he gets along with Hunter better than anybody else would. If it was me, I'd bust him one in the nose and ride away the first time he got real sarcastic. He says it's gettin' so an honest man can't be safe around here. ——, I'm glad somebody is stealin' his danged horses."

"No, yo're not," declared Larkin. "That's no way for a officer to talk, Frenchy. Yo're sorry."

"I am," agreed Frenchy. "I'm sorry they're takin' so danged long to steal 'em all. I'll buy a drink."

As they started back toward the saloon door, Hashknife and Sleepy rode in to town. The three men halted on the saloon porch and watched them dismount at a hitch-rack and go in to a store.

"Who are those punchers?" queried Flannigan.

Larkin shook his head, but crossed the street and took a close look at the two horses. He came back and joined Frenchy and Egg at the bar.

"Horses branded Diamond E," he informed them.

"Clint Evans' brand," said Frenchy. "Prob'ly from Roper."

"That's why I made Frenchy a deputy," whispered Larkin. "I thought he had the makin's of a good detective and, by golly, I was right."

"Aw-w-w!" Frenchy's ear grew red and he tried to spur the sheriff on the ankle.

In a few minutes Hashknife and Sleepy came in. They walked up to the bar, nodding to the sheriff and the other two men, and asked them to join.

"Just rode in," offered Hashknife, "and the dust is plumb bad. Whatcha havin', gents?"

The other men named their choice, and the usual "How!" of the range country was spoken in chorus.

"Just ridin' through?" asked Flannigan.

Hashknife turned from the bar and squinted at Flannigan, his eyes smiling as he took in Flannigan's raiment.

"I dunno whether we'll ride through, or not," he said slowly, and turned to Sleepy. "What day of the week is this?"

"Tuesday," said Sleepy.

Hashknife looked back at Flannigan, but turned away thoughtfully, as he said:

"Tuesday, eh? That's right. I was wonderin' if I'd lost two days."

"Oh, them ain't his Sunday clothes," grinned Frenchy. Flannigan flushed quickly, but could not resist joining in the general laugh that followed.

"No, I wasn't makin' fun of yore clothes," assured Hashknife.

"Thasall right," grinned Flannigan. "It's on me this time."

"I was noticin' that yuh ride a couple of Diamond E brand horses," said the sheriff, as they faced the mirror again.

"Got 'em in Roper," nodded Hashknife. "I think his name was Evans. Cost us a cold hundred apiece, which is a-plenty to pay for somethin' to set on. Seems to me that horses are worth a lot in this man's country.

"The supply is gettin' short," smiled the sheriff.

"Thasso? I heard it was quite a horse country."

"Plenty of country," admitted Frenchy. "Nobody can take that away from us."

"I see," Hashknife nodded understandingly and turned to Larkin. "Yo're the sheriff, ain't yuh?"

"Yeah. Name's Larkin."

"Glad to meetcha, Mr. Larkin. My name's Hartley. My pardner is named Stevens."

They shook hands, and the sheriff introduced them to the others.

"Flannigan?" queried Hashknife. "Egg Flannigan, eh?"

"Yeah. How did you—"

"Heard about the egg," smiled Hashknife.

"Hearin' ain't nothin'," laughed Frenchy. "Man, you should 'a' smelled it!"

"We stopped at the Bar 3 last night," explained Hashknife. "Yore name was mentioned, and they told us how yuh got it, Flannigan. You was in on the deal, wasn't yuh, Sheriff?"

"I was," said Larkin grimly. "It was a dirty deal, too."

"You goin' to work for the Bar 3?" asked Frenchy.

"No, I reckon not," smiled Hashknife. "There ain't much work to do around there, it seems."

"Then you know about the horse stealin', don'tcha?" asked the sheriff.

"They told us about it."

"Didja hear about the stage holdup?" asked Frenchy.

"When was this?" queried Hashknife.

The sheriff watched Hashknife closely, and let Frenchy do the talking. But the tall cowboy merely grinned at Frenchy's description of the holdup.

"Hunter was takin' a big chance, carryin' that much money," declared Hashknife.

"He always carries a roll." Thus Flannigan. "Hunter's one of the kind that likes to make a flash. He's got a lot of money and he acts like he was afraid that everybody might not know it unless he exhibits it once in a while."

"It looks to me," said the sheriff thoughtfully, "like the holdup was done by somebody from Roper. Nobody out here knowed that Hunter was comin' to Greener.

"He prob'ly flashed his roll in Roper and a couple of handy cowpunchers decided that the stage would be worth stickin' up. Mebbe this will teach him a lesson."

Hashknife grinned at Sleepy.

"We overlooked a good bet, pardner. Hunter and family assayed about ten thousand strong."

"And we rode out of Roper ahead of the stage," said Sleepy. "By golly, we sure missed out on that deal."

The sheriff laughed, but his eyes were serious. He had advanced his opinion to see what effect it might have on Hashknife and Sleepy, and they had treated it as a joke. Still he was not at all convinced that they were not the ones who had held up the stage, and Hashknife knew what the sheriff was thinking.

"You fellers just passin' through?" asked Flannigan.

"We ain't voted on anythin' yet," smiled Hashknife. "Yuh see, there ain't nobody chasin' us."

"I wasn't thinkin' thataway," said Flannigan quickly.

LYNN COULTER came in a moment later, and the sheriff introduced him to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Has Hunter been ridin' yuh, Lynn?" asked Flannigan.

"Oh, that —— fool makes me tired," declared Lynn, as he motioned the bartender to put out the glasses. "He's plumb full of advice that nobody would take. He rode Silver Linin' until Silver quit the job—and I had an awful time gettin' Silver to stay."

"He don't think much of me," grinned the sheriff.

"Don'tcha worry about that," said Lynn. "He don't care much for anybody, except himself and his horses. His wife and daughter are out at the ranch, and Silver Linin' is havin' a —— of a time, tryin' to cook things to suit them."

"Is his family as grouchy as he is?" asked Frenchy.

"Nope. They're all right, I reckon. The girl is pretty, and she's got sense."

"I seen 'em in Roper," offered Hashknife. "Me and Sleepy rode out just ahead of the stage."

"Yuh did?" Lynn's brows lifted slightly and he glanced quickly at the sheriff.

Hashknife noted the glance and grinned softly.

"Yeah," he drawled, "and we packed rifles, too."

"What's the idea of addin' that information?" asked the sheriff.

"To show that we have no mustache to deceive the eye. I'm wise to the fact that you kinda wonder if we didn't stick up that stage, sheriff."

"Well?" said the sheriff.

"Perfectly legitimate thought."

"Thasso?" The sheriff squinted intently at Hashknife. "I'm not in the habit of accusin' a man until I've got the deadwood on him, Hartley."

Hashknife laughed and nodded to the bartender.

"I hope yuh don't get the deadwood on me, Sheriff. Me and Sleepy had a reason for comin' to Greener, and we'd hate to have to go to jail."

"Most folks do kinda hate to go to jail," observed Flannigan grinning.

As they turned to the bar Jimmy Ashlock and Army Bean came in, rattling their spurs across the threshold. Ashlock was a small, thin-faced cowboy, with deep-set gray eyes and a wide mouth. Bean was no taller than Ashlock, but was very fat, which caused him to waddle like a duck. His voice was high-pitched, asthmatic, as he greeted the men at the bar.

The sheriff introduced them to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Pleased to—uh—meetcha," said Bean indifferently.

Ashlock shook hands with them, a quizzical expression in his eyes, as he squinted at Hashknife and said:

"Is yore name Hashknife Hartley?"

"That's what they call me, Ashlock."

"Uh-huh. Well, I wonder if I'd ever see yuh, Hartley. Abe Allison is my cousin."

"Abe Allison?"

"Yeah. Turkey Track outfit, Lo Lo Valley."

"Oh, yeah," Hashknife nodded thoughtfully. "Yuh know, I'd almost forgotten Abe Allison. How is he these days?"

"Fine, I reckon. Last time I heard of Abe he was workin' for the JMK outfit. He told me about you two fellers."

"Doin' all right, is he, Ashlock?"

"Y'betcha. And I might tell yuh that Abe ain't forgotten."

"Well, that's fine," smiled Hashknife.

THEY had their drinks, after which Hashknife and Sleepy went to the store, made a few purchases and rode back toward the Bar 3.

The sheriff questioned Ashlock, trying to get some information, but the little cowpuncher shook his head.

"I ain't talkin'," said Ashlock. "I dunno what they're doin' up here, Larkin."

"Are they detectives?" Thus Flannigan.

"I tell yuh, I dunno," declared Ashlock. "But I'll tell yuh this much: If yuh feel like startin' trouble, don't go to them two jiggers and not expect to get what yo're lookin' for, 'cause they'll shore accommodate yuh."

"Bad men, eh?" grinned Flannigan.

"It's all in yore point of view, Egg."

Jimmy Ashlock refused to talk about it further, and a few minutes later he and Army Bean rode out of town. The sheriff was not at all satisfied. He felt that Ashlock knew more about Hashknife and Sleepy than he was willing to tell; something that was not at all in their favor.

"Do you reckon they are detectives?" asked Flannigan.

"My ——, how do I know?" complained Larkin. "They don't look it."

"Does any good detective?" grinned Coulter.

"Do yuh reckon Hunter hired 'em?" Thus Frenchy inspired.

Coulter shook his head.

"I don't think so, Frenchy. Hunter would tell me, if he had. The Cattlemen's Association might."

"Yeah, they might," agreed the sheriff. "By golly, I'll wire Jim Stilwell and find out. I'll send the telegram down to Roper today and have Frenchy wait for an answer."

"I'll see what I can find out from Ashlock," said Coulter. "He might talk about it, Larkin."

"You'd think we were scared of 'em," grinned Flannigan. "Suppose they are detectives—what of it? We've been detected before."

Coulter laughed and threw some money on the bar.

"It does sound like we were afraid of detectives, Egg. If the Five-Dot lose many more horses, I'll be lookin' for a new job; so here's luck to any detective that might come up to the Wild Horse range."

"He'll need it," replied the sheriff gloomily.

Hashknife talked little on their way back

to the Bar 3. He felt that the sheriff had a sneaking suspicion that he and Sleepy had pulled off the holdup. The fact that they had left Roper ahead of the stage and had both carried rifles, made his suspicions well grounded.

Hashknife wondered if Dean Walker and Frosty Hedges knew anything about the holdup. They were carrying rifles when they joined Hashknife and Sleepy on the grades above the Bar 3 ranch-house, possibly an hour after the holdup had taken place.

"Seems to me yo're doin' a lot of heavy thinkin'," observed Sleepy, as they neared the ranch.

"Sure needs a lot of thinkin'," replied Hashknife. "We're liable to have to think ourselves out of jail, unless this sheriff drops the idea of us bein' responsible for the holdup."

"He couldn't pin that on to us, Hashknife."

"Mebbe not. I'd hate to cool my heels in the Roper jail for a month or two, waitin' to find out what a jury would say. What I'm wonderin' about is this, where does Dean Walker and Frosty Hedges stand in this?"

"I never thought of them," admitted Sleepy. "By golly, I wonder?"

"Don't talk about it," advised Hashknife quickly. "Mebbe we're the only ones that know, except Dad and Ma Walker."

"I'm not goin' to talk. But I'd just like to know why the K77 hasn't lost any horses. Egg Flannigan is a pretty gaudy puncher, and he laughs quite a lot."

"A parrot is harmless," said Hashknife.

"Well, I dunno," Sleepy yawned heavily. "Ashlock will prob'ly tell all he knows, which will make it look like we came here to bust up the horse stealin', and the first thing we know we'll be gettin' a billy-doo from the Independent Order of Horse Thieves, tellin' us to fan our fetlocks out of this country."

Hashknife frowned heavily, admitting the wisdom of Sleepy's prophesy. Abe Allison had been mixed up with a crooked outfit in Lo Lo Valley, which had been responsible for the invasion of sheep.

The Turkey Track outfit, mentioned by Ashlock, was, unknown to the rest of the cattlemen, the property of the sheep-men, and the foreman had played a crooked game with both sides; only to be unmasked by Hashknife and Sleepy. Abe Allison, the sole survivor of the Turkey Track, had been allowed to depart in peace, through the intercession of Hashknife, when the irate cattlemen wanted to hang him.

Hashknife felt that Allison had told Ashlock of the whole deal, and that Ashlock would probably tell the story in Greener. And Hashknife knew that Allison had ridden away from Lo Lo Valley thinking that Hashknife and Sleepy were detectives, as he had not stayed long enough to find out that they were but instruments of fate.

"It sure complicates things," said Hashknife. "If the horse thieves find out what we've done in the past, they'll make us pay in the future."

"Sure they will," Sleepy was not at all optimistic. "It looks to me like this would be a tough case, cowboy. When the detective from the Association, and the sheriff's office can't find out a darned thing, it must be pretty close work, don'tcha think?"

Hashknife nodded thoughtfully.

"They've sure got an organization, Sleepy. There don't seem to be anythin' to work on, except one thing."

"What's that?"

"The K77."

"Do you think that Egg Flannigan—"

"Not yet, Sleepy. There's just three outfits in this Wild-Horse range—the Bar 3, K77 and the Five-Dot. Two of 'em have lost a lot of horses—one hasn't lost a single head. What do yuh think?"

"Why haven't they lifted K77 stock, Hashknife?"

"That's the answer."

"Well," said Sleepy, after a pause, "it kinda looks like our gaudy cowboy was in for an investigation. Do yuh reckon he had anythin' to do with the stage holdup?"

"That's a question. Half the men in this country know that George Hunter carries a roll with him. We'll have to find out who was in Roper and knew that Hunter was comin'."

"How about Dean Walker and Frosty Hedges?"

"I'm wonderin', Sleepy. They'd answer to the descriptions, and they were comin' from that direction. But as far as Hunter's money is concerned, I'm not a danged bit interested, except that the holdup might be worth workin' on to help us find out who stole the horses.

"Mebbe it was done by the same men, and mebbe it wasn't. They stole Hunter's

horses—why not his money? But if Ashlock shoots off his mouth about Allison, we'll be goin' down the road, hangin' to the seat of our overalls. I wish I had a chance to talk with Ashlock and explain things to him."

"Well," grinned Sleepy, "you wanted to raise bees, pardner, and I'll betcha we'll hear somethin' buzzin' pretty soon."

"That's right, Sleepy. Don't say too much around Dean and Frosty."

II

SILVER LINING rattled the last of a mess of beans off the table-top into a stew-kettle, and turned to Grace Hunter, who had been an interested observer of the process.

"Yes'm," said Silver Lining. "It shore is romantic, separatin' rocks from beans thataway."

"I mean that cattle-ranching is romantic," said the girl.

"Yeah, it shore is." The Five-Dot cook poured water over the kettle of beans and placed them on the stove. "I've been on cattle-ranches for twenty years, ma'am, and I like it so well that I think I'll stay."

Grace Hunter laughed softly.

"I think you are very quaint."

Silver Lining scratched his stubbled chin reflectively.

"Quaint? Uh-huh, I s'pose. I've been called a lot of names in my short period on this here mortal coil, but that's shore a new one. How's yore pa this mornin'?"

"He's all right."

"Changed completely over night, eh?"

"Changed? Why, I didn't know anything was wrong."

"Thasso?" Silver Lining examined the edge of a butcher-knife closely. "Well, yuh probab'ly wouldn't—bein' with him all the time."

Grace Hunter missed the implication, and a moment later Army Bean and Jimmy Ashlock came up to the kitchen door.

"Hey!" yelled Army. "Where's our lunches, you food murderer?"

"Take 'em now, or wait'll yuh git 'em?" retorted the cook. "Nobody told me to fix up lunches for yuh."

Hunter came in from the dining-room and joined Grace, who was smiling at Silver Lining's belligerent attitude.

"What's the trouble?" asked Hunter.

"Everybody git out of here," ordered the cook. "By the great horn-spoon, this is my Alamo, and I'm goin' to defend her. Jimmy, you and Army git away from that door before yuh git salivated; *sabe?* Hunter, you fade out. Mebbe yuh own this danged Five-Dot outfit, but my soul and my kitchen belong to me. Vamoose!"

Army and Jimmy moved out of line with the door, and Hunter joined them, while Grace retreated inside the dining-room.

"I'm going to look for a new chef today," Hunter told them.

"Yuh are?" Jimmy seemed surprized. "What for?"

"I'm going to get a cook who will take orders."

"Fire Silver Linin'?" Thus Army wonderingly. "Sa-a-ay, don'tcha do nothin' like that. My ga-a-awsh, he's the best there is."

"I won't be fired out of my own kitchen."

"Then stay out to begin with," advised Jimmy. "There ain't no cook in the world that'll let yuh horn into his job."

Lynn Coulter joined them and the talk drifted to the horse stealing. Hunter was still smarting from his verbal encounter with the sheriff and deputy the day before, and did not try to conceal his feelings.

"Larkin won't do a thing," complained Hunter. "I don't believe he would arrest anybody, even if he thought they were guilty."

"Well, I'd hate to take a chance with him," grinned Army.

"I've been wonderin' if the horse thieves were the ones who held up the stage," said Coulter. "Larkin don't think so."

"Oh, don't he?" Hunter was sarcastic. "Who does he suspect?"

"I've got a hunch that he thinks those two strangers, Hartley and Stevens were the ones."

"Aw, ——!" Thus Jimmy Ashlock explosively. Hunter looked curiously at Jimmy and around at the others.

"Ashlock seems to know something about them," he remarked.

"I know enough to tell me that they didn't do it."

"Well, what are they doin' here?" demanded Coulter.

"Ask 'em."

"They came in ahead of the stage," said Hunter. "The holdups had rifles."

"And these men carry rifles," added Coulter.

Pete Falls came up from the bunk-house and joined the group, just as Silver Lining announced that the two lunches were ready.

"There's plenty of riders carryin' rifles," declared Jimmy. "That same day I seen Dean Walker and Frosty Hedges over at the K77, and they were packin' rifles. That was just a while before the holdup, too. Packin' a rifle don't mean that yo're a hold-up man."

Jimmy and Army secured their lunches and headed for the corral, where their horses were already saddled. They would be gone nearly all day.

"I wonder if the sheriff knows about Walker and Hedges," said Hunter. "Ashlock might have just stumbled on to the solution."

"He might, at that," agreed Coulter thoughtfully. "It's one cinch that neither of them are horse thieves, though. The Bar 3 have lost nearly all their stock; and Dean Walker wouldn't steal from himself."

"I'm going to Greener," decided Hunter. "I'll put this up to Larkin and see what he says. I don't expect him to do anything, except to talk insultingly to me, but," Hunter sighed heavily, "my shoulders are wide and thick, and I can stand it."

Hunter turned and went toward the front porch, leaving Coulter and Pete Falls looking after him.

"Yeah, and so is yore head," muttered Pete.

Hunter turned at the corner of the porch and called to Pete.

"Hitch up the rig for me, Falls."

Hunter disappeared around the corner, after which Pete thumbed his nose in that direction.

"Bark for yore dinner, Falls," said Silver Lining, from the kitchen window, chuckling merrily. "I'll loan yuh my plug-hat, if yuh want to drive him to town."

Pete reached for a rock and Silver Lining slammed the window down.

"Yeah, I'll bust you one on the nose!" snorted Falls.

"Yeah, and I'll feed yuh cracked glass, you—you slave."

FALLS bow-legged his way down to the stable, and Coulter turned to see Egg Flannigan riding in. Egg was extra resplendent today; due partly to a robin's-egg-blue silk shirt, and to the fact that his silver trimmings had been duly polished for the occasion.

He rode a tall, high-stepping bay gelding; the best that the K77 afforded. He rode up to Coulter and dismounted.

"Hyah, Lynn," he grinned.

"Pretty good," Lynn examined the silk shirt closely.

"Twelve dollars in Sheridan," declared Egg.

"Yeah? What's the idea of the parade?"

"Well," Egg grinned widely. "I thought I'd kinda ride over and let Miss Hunter get a look at me. Yuh won't mind givin' me a knock-down to her, will yuh?"

"No-o-o, I reckon not. C'mon."

He led Flannigan around to the porch, where they found the Hunter family, taking their ease in the shade. Lynn performed the introduction and sat down on the steps with the gaudy cowboy.

" 'S funny I never met yuh, Hunter," ob-observed Flannigan. "Jist seems like we never run together. How do yuh like this country, Miss Hunter?"

"I like it fine," replied Grace, her eyes dancing.

"That's fine. You like it, Mrs. Hunter?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so," replied Mrs. Hunter dubiously.

"That means yuh don't very well," said Egg. "Old folks never do like it so well as young ones."

Mrs. Hunter flushed quickly and Grace covered a smile with a handkerchief. Mrs. Hunter was hardly fifty years of age. But Egg took no notice.

"How long are yuh goin' to stay this time, Hunter?"

"Problematical."

It was evident that Flannigan had not made any impression on Hunter. At least, not a favorable one.

"You lost any horses lately?" queried Flannigan.

Hunter snorted. It was a sore spot with him.

"I suppose you haven't, Flannigan."

"Nossir," Egg hugged his knees and leaned back against a post. "They don't like the brand I raise, I reckon. Anyway, they steer clear of the K77."

"Possibly there's a reason," said Hunter.

"Reason?" Egg squinted at Hunter closely. "Yeah," he said slowly, "there must be a reason, Hunter. What do yuh reckon it is?"

"I am not in a position to say—yet.

There are only three horse outfits on this range, Flannigan. Two have suffered heavy losses this year; one has lost none. There must be a reason."

Coulter was watching Flannigan closely. He tried to catch Hunter's eye and signal him to drop the subject, but Hunter was evidently looking for trouble, or ignorant of where this talk might lead.

"It sure is queer," nodded Flannigan thoughtfully.

"It looks queer," corrected Hunter. "It looks queer for the K77 to never lose—"

Flannigan came quickly to his feet, like the snap of a jack-in-the-box, and faced Hunter, whose lips had gone white. Flannigan's expression had not changed, except that his eyes were almost closed, and his nose twitched nervously.

"Hunter," he said slowly, "the ice is thin where yo're standin'."

"Easy, Flannigan," advised Coulter. "Remember Hunter is sore and don't *sabe* what his talk means."

Flannigan relaxed slightly, nodded shortly and walked down the steps, where he turned.

"Mrs. Hunter and Miss Hunter, I'm pleased to have met yuh both," he said calmly. "So-long, Lynn."

"So-long, Flannigan," said Coulter.

The gaudy cowboy swung into his saddle and rode swiftly away, never looking back, while those on the porch remained silent until the rider had faded out in a haze of dust. Pete Falls drove the buggy horses up to the porch and got out, waiting for Hunter to take charge.

"Well," said Hunter defiantly, "the K77 know how I feel about it."

He walked down and took the lines from Falls.

"Yes," admitted Coulter, "I kinda think that Flannigan knew what you meant. It was dangerous talk, Hunter."

"Dangerous?" Hunter laughed angrily and climbed into the buggy. "If this country thinks I'm going to sit idly by and see my horses stolen, they've got another think coming."

"Yo're the doctor," nodded Coulter.

Hunter whirled the horse around and drove swiftly out to the main road. Mrs. Hunter went into the house, leaving Grace with Coulter and Falls. The latter squinted after Hunter, turned and went back toward the bunk-house.

"Did Dad mean that Mr. Flannigan was a thief?" asked the girl.

"Well, he kinda intimated that he might be," smiled Coulter.

"He doesn't look like a thief."

"No, he looks more like a Christmas tree," grinned Coulter.

He sat down beside her and rolled a cigaret.

"Is Mr. Flannigan a married man?" she asked.

Coulter looked sidewise at her, and grinned.

"You're not interested in Flannigan, are you?"

"Not in the least."

"I wonder if you'd like me better if I wore loud clothes."

Grace laughed, coloring slightly.

"He does put a note of color in the picture, Mr. Coulter. But he is the type who can wear bright colors. He has good eyes."

"I throw up both hands," laughed Coulter. "When a woman begins talking about a man's eyes—good-by. I wonder who this is."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy swung in off the main road and came up to the porch, where they dismounted. Grace went in the house, before Hashknife and Sleepy reached the porch. Coulter greeted them by name and invited them to sit down in the shade.

"Just ridin' around, lookin' over the range," volunteered Hashknife. "So we thought we'd stop and say howdy."

"Glad yuh did," said Coulter. "What do yuh think of it?"

"Pretty good. We were thinkin' of buyin' the Bar 3; so we had to look around a little."

"Is that so?" Coulter seemed surprized. "Is Walker sellin' out?"

"Well, he hasn't sold out yet. He set a price, but we ain't accepted it yet. Yuh see, all this horse stealin' kinda cuts the value out of a brand, and until it's stopped —well, yuh see how it is."

"I ought to," said Coulter quickly. "The Five-Dot has lost a-plenty. By golly, it sure is a tough deal, Hartley."

"Uh-huh. Say," Hashknife leaned closer to Coulter, "what do you know about the K77?"

"Just in what way, Hartley?"

"Why haven't they lost any horses?"

Coulter laughed and told them what had transpired between Hunter and Flannigan.

"What is yore personal opinion?" queried Hashknife.

"I haven't any—to talk about. Hunter is a fool."

"Prob'ly mad," smiled Hashknife.

"What does Walker think?" asked Coulter.

"I dunno. We've had some talk about it, but the Old Man don't seem to suspect any one."

"It's hard to suspect any one," agreed Coulter seriously. "The horses merely disappear. Larkin, the sheriff, had a fine idea a short time ago. He had us put several head of good horses in a corral at Crazy Man flats, and the sheriff's outfit watched 'em for five nights.

"Larkin got tired of his job; so me and Pete Falls went up there and laid out for one night. We didn't see nor hear a thing, but we came back to find five horses missin' from the corral here. They were a matched five, too, and worth money."

"Outsmarted yuh, eh?" Thus Hashknife thoughtfully. "Looks to me like it was somebody who had inside information."

"It sure does; but who can it be? You can't steal horses without disposing of them, Hartley. There isn't a man missing off this range long enough to dispose of horses. So that's one of the queer points of the game."

"It's a sticker," agreed Hashknife. "They tell me that there was a detective in here, but the horse thieves got wise to him."

"And sent him a warnin'," nodded Coulter.

"That sure was a thoughtful thing to do," grinned Sleepy. "I don't reckon we want to buy in on this range, Hashknife. If there's anythin' I hate it's to get letters from a strange horse thief. Most of 'em can't even write plain."

"I'd rather get a warning than a bullet," smiled Coulter.

"Oh, me, too," said Sleepy hastily. "Yuh don't reckon they'd shoot a man, do yuh?"

"I'm sure I don't know," grinned Coulter. "Horse thieves have been known to shoot."

Sleepy shuddered and spilled the tobacco from his cigaret-paper.

"Dang it all, I'm nervous," he admitted. "I reckon we better pull our freight out of this country, Hashknife."

"There's no reason for a horse thief to shoot us," said Hashknife. "They ought to welcome a new horse raiser. By golly, they ought to give us a banquet and hand us the keys to the town."

Hashknife laughed and got to his feet.

"I reckon we better be on the move, Sleepy."

"Yeah, I s'pose."

They shook hands with Coulter and rode away.

"Why didn't yuh ask for Ashlock?" queried Sleepy.

"No use forcin' the issue, Sleepy. He wasn't around there. This is one queer deal. Hunter is the only person that has come out and voiced a suspicion."

"Yeah, and Flannigan will prob'ly make him hard to catch for talkin' thataway. Hunter is an awful sucker to make a play like that when he ain't got a bit of evidence to go on. It sure is a wonder that Flannigan didn't bounce a hunk of lead off Hunter's waistline."

THEY found Egg Flannigan in the Greener bar, and Egg was full of liquor. It was not often that Flannigan drank unwisely. With him was Frenchy O'Regan, who was also joyfully organized. They greeted Hashknife and Sleepy solemnly.

"Goin' t' shing," announced Egg. "Lissen t'me." He cleared his throat and beat time with the index finger of his right hand.

"Oh, we'll hang George Hunter on a shour apple tree-e-e;
We'll hang George Hunter on a shour apple tree-e-e—"

"And 'n what'll we do?" asked Frenchy owlishly.

"All depen's on Hunter himshelf." He turned to Hashknife.

"You ain't frien' to Hunter 'r yuh?"

"Never met him," grinned Hashknife.

"Goo' f'r you. By gosh, that's a honor. Yessir, yuh shore are honored. He's a —— fool, 'f there ever wash one. Know what he done? Don't cha?"

"Lemme tell it," begged Frenchy. "Yo're drunk, Egg."

"Aw-w-w ri'," resignedly. "You tell 'm, Frenchy."

"He—he—" Frenchy backed against the bar, in order to keep his balance, adjusted his hat carefully and blinked wisely.

"He swore out a warrant and had the

sheriff arresht Dean Walker and Fr-r-rosty Hedges for holdin' up the stage. That's what he done."

"For gosh sake!" exploded Hashknife.

"Me, too," nodded Egg. "I feel jus' like you do."

"Where did the sheriff take 'em?" asked Hashknife.

"To Roper," grunted Frenchy. "Lef' me here to keep peash."

"Keep what?" asked Sleepy.

"Peash and tranquil'ty, I s'pose," Frenchy cuffed his hat to another angle and spat dryly. "I s'pose I'll be lucky to save my saddle-horsh. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" Frenchy doubled up with mirth.

Hashknife and Sleepy managed to get away from them, and went across the street to a general merchandise store, seeking sober information. The proprietor sold them some tobacco, and Hashknife's remark—"I understand they've caught the holdup men," brought results.

"Yes, the sheriff took them to Roper a while ago," stated the clerk. "It was quite a surprize. Old man Walker came to town with them, and I felt sorry for him."

"I wonder what evidence the sheriff has against 'em," said Hashknife.

"None. Anyway, I heard him say he hadn't. George Hunter, who owns the Five-Dot, demanded that the sheriff arrest 'em; so what can the sheriff do? Perhaps Hunter has evidence."

Hashknife and Sleepy went back to their horses and rode out of town toward the Bar 3.

"Thank gosh the old man was with 'em," said Hashknife. " 'Cause I sure hate to pack that news to the ranch. Must 'a' been one awful wallop. I just wonder what the evidence is, Sleepy. Dean ain't no milk-fed infant, and neither is Frosty, but somehow I can't figure they held up the stage."

They found the old folks on the ranch-house porch, trying calmly to figure a way out of their troubles. There were tear-streaks on Ma Walker's cheeks, but she greeted them with a smile.

"You heard about it, didn't yuh?" Dad Walker knew by their expressions that they had already heard.

"Yeah, they told us about it in Greener, Dad," nodded Hashknife. "What evidence has Hunter got?"

Dad shook his head slowly.

"I don't think he has any. Larkin didn't want to arrest them, but Hunter demanded it; so what could the sheriff do?"

"Not a thing, Dad."

"But Dean isn't guilty," Ma Walker's eyes filled with tears and her voice broke. "I know my boy too well to ever think that he would do a thing like that."

"——, he never done it," assured Sleepy warmly. "Ex-cuse my dialect, Ma. You just leave it to me and Hashknife. By golly, we'll find the guilty ones, y'betcha."

"Oh, I wish you could. But what can you do? The sheriff can't find out a thing, and that detective—"

"Hunter hasn't anythin' against you, has he, Dad?" asked Hashknife.

"Not a thing, Hartley. In fact, we hardly know him. We have always tried to do right by everybody, and if we have an enemy, we do not know who it can be."

"Has Dean ever been in any trouble?"

"No."

"Frosty?"

"No, nothing serious. Frosty is a little wild and rough, but he has never been mixed up in anything that the law could touch him for."

"Well, that's settled. You ain't got no enemies; so this ain't done for spite. It kinda looks to me like Hunter found out that Dean and Frosty were ridin' in the hills that day, each one with a rifle; so he demanded their arrest."

"They can't convict 'em on that evidence," assured Sleepy.

"That's what I've been tellin' Ma," said Dad hopefully. "They'll get a hearing and be turned loose for lack of evidence."

"In a justice court in this country, anythin' can happen," said Hashknife. "Hunter will have to appear against 'em, and we don't know what evidence he's got. He's so mad that mebbe he'll swear they were the ones. If he can positively identify 'em, they'll be bound over to the superior court for trial. And in this country they might be in jail three months before bein' tried."

"A positive identification is difficult," said Dad slowly.

LATER, as they talked over the possibility of this, Egg Flannigan —sober—rode in at the ranch-house gate, waved a greeting and dismounted at the porch. Flannigan's eyes were hard and his jaw firm, as he faced

Dad Walker; and he wasted no time in explaining why he had come to a ranch where he so seldom visited.

"Walker, I've come to offer my help," he stated. "I heard what Hunter pulled off, and I just want to tell yuh that I'm backin' yuh. If —yuh need money or six-guns, just yelp toward the K77."

Dad got to his feet and looked at Flannigan, whose jaw seemed even more belligerent now.

"Well, Flannigan, I'm sure obliged to yuh," said Dad slowly. "Won't yuh set down?"

"For a minute or two, Walker. Howdy, Hartley, Stevens. What do you fellers think of this deal?"

"We was just talkin' about it," said Hashknife. "They told us about it in Greener. We met you just outside town, if yuh remember, and a little later we met Hunter, goin' toward town."

"You went out to the Five-Dot, Hartley?"

"Yeah. We talked a while with Coulter and came back."

"What do you think about it?" Thus Sleepy.

He did not like Flannigan.

"Here's what I know. Dean and Frosty were at my place just before the holdup. They left in time to have pulled the job. Army Bean and Jimmy Ashlock were at my place at the same time, and they talked with Dean and Frosty, who pulled out toward the main road. That evidence is against 'em. If Hunter wants to identify 'em as the robbers, they've got a hard row to hoe."

"All right," nodded Hashknife. "Me and Sleepy pulled out of Roper ahead of the stage that mornin'. We were both packin' Winchesters, and the stage never passed us. Prob'ly we're guilty."

"Well, that's yore business," said Flannigan curtly.

"How about Army Bean and Ashlock?" queried Sleepy.

Flannigan shook his head.

"Not a chance. They didn't leave the K77 for an hour after Dean and Frosty left."

"How many men do you hire?" asked Hashknife.

"Only two; 'Navajo' Clark and 'Thirsty' Thurston. They were both at the ranch that afternoon, when Bean and Ashlock were there."

"It kinda simmers down," admitted Hashknife. "How many men does the Five-Dot use?"

"Four, includin' Lynn Coulter. I've known Lynn a long time. Pete Falls has been there quite a long time, but Bean and Ashlock have only been there about a year. Buck Keen and Larry Elkins used to work for Hunter, but they had a run-in with him and quit."

"Who are they workin' for now?" Thus Dad Walker.

"I dunno, Walker. I heard that Buck was workin' for the TR outfit on the Powder. Larry hooked up with some outfit near the Montana border, but I dunno whether he stayed or not."

Flannigan got to his feet and hitched up his belt.

"Well, I reckon I'll be siftin' along, folks."

Dad Walker held out his hand to the ornate cowboy.

"Flannigan, I want yuh to know I appreciate you comin' to offer help. I may need it, yuh see."

"Well, I've offered it to yuh," smiled Flannigan, gripping the old man's hand.

He nodded to Ma Walker and went to his horse.

As he settled in his saddle he grinned at the group on the porch, and said meaningly:

"If yuh need money, let me know, Walker. Yuh see, the K77 ain't lost nothin'."

He swung his horse around and rode swiftly away. For a space of time no one spoke. Hashknife frowned thoughtfully over his cigaret.

"I don't quite understand what he meant," said Dad slowly. "Why should he offer us help?"

"It was awful nice of him," said Ma warmly. "It was like a bolt of lightning out of a blue sky. Why, he almost never comes here; and he's the last person I would ever think of asking for help."

"He's mad about somethin'," smiled Hashknife. "I've been thinkin' about this proposition, folks. Naturally you two want to be near Dean. Suppose that you pull out for Roper and let me and Sleepy run the ranch for a while. Yuh might intimate that we've decided to buy yuh out."

"I never thought of that," said Dad. "Why—" He looked at his wife, whose

eyes were wistful with the hope that Dad might accept. He turned away, frowning thoughtfully.

"We'd take good care of everythin'."

"And you folks ought to be down there," said Sleepy.

Dad Walker nodded slowly.

"That's right, boys. I reckon Ma and me will go in the mornin'. I—I'm obliged to yuh."

Ma Walker got to her feet and walked to the doorway.

"I think," she said softly, "we've got lots of friends, Dad."

III

THREE days later Hashknife was no nearer to a solution of the horse stealing and stage robbery. Ma and Dad Walker had gone to Roper to stay until they knew what was to happen to Dean and Frosty.

Larkin, the sheriff, had ridden out to the Bar 3 the day after he had taken the two boys to jail, and talked matters over with Hashknife, but without results. Larkin seemed to be of the opinion that Hunter would positively identify the boys; which would mean that they would be held for the first term of court.

Hashknife knew that Larkin still half-suspected him and Sleepy of being the stage robbers, but had no evidence against them. In Larkin's pocket was a telegram from the Cattlemen's Association, which read:

"The two men you mention are not connected in any way with this organization."

And it was signed by Jim Stilwell.

This seemed to refute the idea that Hashknife and Sleepy were in that country to work aginst the horse thieves; but Larkin had told no one except Frenchy O'Regan. But Hashknife felt that Jimmy Ashlock had broadcasted the fact that he and Sleepy had busted up a crooked outfit in Lo Lo Valley; and he had a feeling that the horse thieves were already prepared for them.

And he was not at all surprized when he and Sleepy rode in from an evening at Greener to find a notice pinned to the front door of the Bar 3 ranch-house, which read, in a penciled scrawl—

Get out of this country and keep out.

It was unsigned. Hashknife studied it under the light of the oil lamp on the center-table, while Sleepy humped on the couch and labored over a cigaret.

"I'm sure scared," observed Sleepy. "Ain't got spit enough left to stick a cigaret paper. Whoo-ee-e! Can yuh look at that notice and figure out who sent it, cowboy? My ——, you sure are serious."

"She's a serious business, Sleepy," Hashknife placed the paper on the table and began rolling a cigaret. "They came here after we left today."

"Well," Sleepy leaned back, hugging his knees, his collar hiked up around his ears, "we ought to have somebody playin' that sneaky music, like they do at a the-a-ter. Yuh don't suppose they'll kill us right off the reel, do yuh? My gosh, they never gave us any certain length of time to get out."

Hashknife grinned as he lighted his cigaret over the top of the lamp-chimney.

"This ain't no time to grin," declared Sleepy.

"Any time is the time to grin. I'll be danged if this ain't the queerest deal I've ever been up against. Sleepy, there ain't nothin' to start on. I think in circles and every one revolves back to Flannigan. Somehow, I think the K77 is the key to it all."

"Looks kinda funny," agreed Sleepy. "For why does Flannigan come rompin' over here and offer to help Dad Walker? Did he have a hand in it, Hashknife?"

"Not in the stage robbery. He's got an alibi for that. But the fact that the K77 hasn't lost a single head of stock looks gosh-awful queer to me. And Flannigan's no fool, even if he does wear gaudy clothes. It's an outside job, Sleepy."

"Which won't soften the impact of a bullet against my ribs. I'd just as soon be killed by some one I know. I'll betcha I won't sleep a wink tonight—not a danged wink, I tell yuh."

Sleepy stretched out on the couch and began singing softly:

"They hung him twice
And shot him full of lead,
But the gol darned galoot
Wasn't noways dead.
So they fed him dynamite
And threw him off a bluff;
He got mad and left the place,
'Cause he had enough."

Hashknife snorted and began rummaging around in a book-case against the wall.

"Don'tcha like my singin'?" queried Sleepy. "Yuh don't?"

"I never said anythin', Sleepy."

"Whatcha lookin' for—a Bible?"

Hashknife leaned against the wall, examining a black-covered book, the covers of which would measure about twelve inches square.

"Remember the old JHL outfit, Sleepy?"

"Yeah. What about 'em?"

"Brand has been cancelled."

"What book yuh got there, Hashknife?"

"Brand registry of Montana. Lot of familiar irons here, cowboy. There's the old Bridle-Bit, the KT, the XOT and the X88. It sure does bring back memories to see them old marks."

"Yeah, it would. Memories of somebody shootin' at yuh. Excuse me, pardner, but I'd rather talk about now. You'll never get killed by the bullets that have gone past."

But Hashknife humped over the book and refused to be cajoled into an argument. Sleepy locked the house and went to bed, leaving the elongated cowboy poring over the brand register, a serious expression on his face.

It was long past midnight when Hashknife put the book away, but there was a serious grin on his lips as he drew off his boots and prepared for bed. He rolled a last cigaret. As he smoked slowly he drew cabalistic marks on the top of a dusty boot with the index finger of his right hand; after which he wiped the boot-top on the rag-carpet, blew out the lamp and climbed in beside Sleepy, who was snoring raucously.

And while Hashknife pored over his book, George Hunter, Lynn Coulter, Army Bean and Jimmy Ashlock rode back from Roper, where they had attended the hearing of Dean Walker and Frosty Hedges.

Hunter's identification of the two boys was by no means positive but, coupled with Bean's and Ashlock's testimony of Dean and Frosty's departure from the K77, and of their general appearance at that time, was sufficient for the prosecuting attorney to get them bound over to the superior court.

"I came here determined to do something," declared Hunter, as they rode home. "I think I can get a conviction in this case, and I think that this will stop the horse-stealing."

"Then you think that Walker and Hedges are the horse thieves?" asked Coulter.

"Positively."

"Pshaw!" Coulter was unconvinced. "Would Dean Walker steal from his father?"

"Stranger things than that have happened."

"Well, it's your business," said Coulter. "Personally, I don't think they're guilty. What about Hartley and Stevens? They knew you were coming on that stage, and they started out ahead of it. Both of them carry rifles."

"Well, my ——, I' can't arrest everybody!" blurted Hunter.

"I'm merely suggesting," said Coulter.

"I'll run my own business, Lynn."

Coulter had nothing more to say, knowing from experience that there was no use in arguing with Hunter.

THE following morning Hunter ordered Coulter to ride to the K77 and buy those two pinto horses. He also wanted Coulter to bring in several more ponies, which might possibly be worth breaking as polo prospects.

Pete Falls rode with Coulter, while Army and Jimmy worked on a corral, under the personal supervision of Hunter. It was not to their liking, but both men had a sense of humor and enjoyed listening to Hunter's exploitation of his own ability.

Flannigan sold the pinto ponies to Coulter, and expressed the hope that Hunter might get within reach of their hoofs. Coulter told him what had happened at the hearing in Roper, and Flannigan cursed Hunter whole-heartedly.

"Don't mind Hunter," advised Coulter. "He's a —— fool."

"He sure is. Mebbe he don't know it, but he came within an inch of gettin' his earthly envelope torn plumb across one end. Next time he opens his mouth to me, I'm goin' to hit him so hard he won't never get it shut again."

It was several hours later that Lynn and Pete drove a small herd of horses down to the Five-Dot corral. Pete's right pants-leg was torn and he was hardly able to walk from the corral to the bunk-house.

"Aw, his horse fell with him," grumbled Coulter. "Pete ain't got enough sense to ride down a hill."

"Hurt badly?" asked Hunter, who was more interested in the ten head of horses than he was in Pete's injury.

"Not very bad," said Coulter. "Just kinda bunged it up a little. How do yuh like them painted broncs?"

"Pretty things," admired Hunter. "Circus stock."

The other eight were two and three-year-olds, unbroken, but promising, and Hunter nodded approvingly, as they circled the high corral, looking for a way out.

"I think we can fill that Philadelphia order out of that bunch, Lynn. We'll start breaking 'em tomorrow."

"All right," Lynn grinned dubiously. "Today is pay-day, yuh know. The boys will want to hit for town, and tomorrow they prob'ly won't be in shape to break horses. Anyway it's Sunday."

"That's right," grudgingly. "Well, Monday will be all right."

The bunk-house reeked with liniment and profanity, while Army and Jimmy prepared to spend the night in Greener. Pete Falls sat on the edge of a bunk, sopping his knee with liniment, and cursing his luck. He could hardly walk.

"We'll git yuh one of them wheel-chairs," grinned Jimmy. "How'll that strike yuh? Or yuh might hand me yore forty dollars and tell me which number yuh consider lucky. Poor old Pete! By golly, it shore is tough when yuh git old and infernal."

"Shut up, yuh digger!" roared Pete. "You think yo're smart."

"Thasall right, Pete," grinned Army. "Next month you'll have eighty to spend—if yuh don't fall off yo're bronc agin'."

Pete cursed them out of the bunk-house, and threw some extra anathemas at Lynn Coulter who was going with them. It was hard luck to be crippled on pay-day, and Pete did not care who knew it. Even Silver Lining would head for town as soon as the supper dishes were washed.

Whether by accident or by design all the ranches paid off on the same day; which made good business for Greener. It was always a gala occasion, and more so because of the fact that this pay-day came on Saturday, which would give them an extra day.

Mike Larkin and Frenchy were there. The sheriff knew that men were liable to talk quite a lot when whisky flowed generously; and he wanted to hear some talk. Hashknife and Sleepy met him in the general store, and Hashknife told him about the warning on their door.

The sheriff squinted seriously.

"Yeah, that's what they told the other detective."

"But we're not detectives," said Hashknife.

"I know it," Larkin grinned wisely. "I wondered if yuh was; so I wired Jim Stilwell, secretary of the Association. Here's what he said."

Hashknife's eyes twinkled as he read the telegram.

"I wish you'd post that up somewhere," grinned Hashknife. "Me and you and Sleepy know that we ain't detectives, but them darned horse thieves don't know it. And their ignorance will just about ruin us, Sheriff."

"Well, I'll do what I can, Hartley. Of course," Larkin grinned widely, "I don't know who to tell it to, do you?"

"Not yet," grinned Hashknife.

Larkin looked curiously at them as they walked away, and scratched his head reflectively.

"That sounded kinda funny," he told himself.

A few minutes later he ran into Coulter and Ashlock, and in course of their conversation he imparted the information that he had received an answer to his wire to the Cattlemen's Association regarding Hashknife and Sleepy, and that they were in no way connected with the organization.

"Then they are not detectives, eh?" said Coulter.

"Naw. I talked with 'em a while ago, and they told me that a warnin' had been pinned to their door. Somebody just got the wrong hunch, thasall."

"Wait and see." Thus Jimmy Ashlock.

"Wait for what?" asked the sheriff.

"Just wait and see what happens. I'll bet even money that Hartley and Stevens clean up this gang inside of a month."

"Yeah?" The sheriff was interested now. "Bet even money, eh? How much will yuh bet, Jimmy?"

"My next month's pay—forty honest dollars."

"I'll take that bet—and hope I lose," said the sheriff seriously. "It'll be worth that much to me. But what makes yuh think they'll clean up this gang, Jimmy?"

"Just a hunch—and knowin' what they

have done. If yuh want odds on the bet—find Abe Allison."

Jimmy sauntered away, whistling unmusically between his teeth, and the sheriff looked curiously at Coulter.

"Who's Allison, Lynn?"

"A cousin of Ashlock, I reckon. Works on some ranch north of here, so Jimmy says. I've never met him."

The Greener saloon was the social center for those who carried a month's pay. A roulette-wheel, faro-game and several poker tables catered to those who would woo the goddess of chance, and two bartenders worked feverishly to wipe away the drouth of a month's accumulation of alkali dust.

Egg Flannigan came to town with Thirsty Thurston, and they proceeded to organize themselves into a committee of two, to absorb as much as possible. Hashknife and Sleepy drank nothing, and their pockets soon bulged with cigars, which they would not smoke. They were there to hear what they might hear.

Flannigan was not happy with his liquor. He growled a greeting to those who spoke to him, declined drinks, as if trying to force somebody to argue with him. But the cowboys of the Wild Horse range were too joyful to start trouble.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy passed the bar and Flannigan's roving eyes fell upon them.

"C'mere, you —— detectives!" he yelled. "Have a drink with a horse thief."

"I'd just as soon drink with a horse thief as with anybody else," grinned Hashknife. "How's business, Flannigan?"

The crowd laughed, but Flannigan swore, as he turned to the bar. Coulter and Ashlock came from the roulette game and moved in beside Hashknife. Coulter had been drinking and was inclined to loudness. Flannigan squinted at Coulter.

"Where's Hunter?" he asked.

"Out at the ranch," said Coulter.

"That dirty pup!" snorted Flannigan. "I'm goin' to kick the gizzard out of that coyote next time we meet."

"Hop to it," laughed Coulter.

"I sure will."

"All right," said Coulter. "Don't talk so —— much."

"Is—that—so?" Flannigan pushed away from the bar and walked behind Hashknife. Coulter turned and they faced each other.

"I'll talk all I —— please; *sabe?*" Flannigan was mad now.

"Don't try to start anythin' with me," advised Coulter warningly.

Hashknife stepped between them.

"Forget it," he advised. "Both of yuh are lettin' whisky do yore talkin'. You wouldn't quarrel when yo're sober."

"What the —— business is it of yours?" demanded Flannigan. "Go out and detect horse thieves, you —— fool!"

Hashknife's lips tightened, but he did not lose his grin.

"A feller hates to be called a fool," he said slowly.

"Especially when he is one," observed Coulter. Flannigan's laugh was silenced when Hashknife's left fist caught him between the ear and point of his chin, and he went backwards, walking on his high-heels, making queer little jig-steps, only to crash into a poker-table and fall flat.

The splat of Hashknife's fist had hardly sounded when Hashknife was facing Coulter, who dived into him, smashing with both hands. One of the punches caught Hashknife over the right eye, while the other thudded against his shoulder, driving him back.

Coulter caught his balance and made another headlong rush, but Hashknife avoided this one. Blood was running down Hashknife's face, and as yet he had made no effort to strike Coulter.

"You've got him, Lynn!" yelled Army Bean. "One more punch, old-timer."

Hashknife hunched slightly and seemed more interested in Coulter's feet than his face, as they circled each other. Coulter immediately assumed the offensive again, but his blows flailed short, when Hashknife's long left flattened Coulter's nose.

Coulter struck savagely at Hashknife's forearm, but did not connect. Then he rushed, intending to clinch, but that left snapped into his face again, straightening him up; and before he could shift his feet, Hashknife's right hand, unclenched, seemed to merely tap against his throat.

Coulter's head jerked forward and he went to his knees; all the fight taken out of him. Flannigan was sitting up, watching the fight and feeling tenderly of his own jaw.

"You've got him, Lynn!" mimicked a voice in the crowd.

Hashknife leaned back against the bar

and mopped his bleeding forehead with a handkerchief, while Sleepy's eyes roved the crowd for signs of hostility.

"Is everybody satisfied?" asked Sleepy.

"I am."

It was Flannigan. He got to his feet and rubbed his jaw. The punch had driven the liquor from his brain.

"Whew!" he snorted. "That sure was some punch."

He looked at Coulter, who was feeling of his throat with both hands, as though trying to discover what had happened to him.

"You got some punch, too, eh?" Flannigan smiled painfully. "Well, I dunno but what we got what was comin' to us." He turned to Hashknife. "I apologize for what I said, Hartley. Good-night."

"Yore apology is sure accepted, Flannigan," said Hashknife. Flannigan walked outside, without looking back, meeting Larkin in the doorway.

The sheriff came in and looked at Coulter, who was still sitting on the floor.

"What happened in here?" he asked quickly. "Who hit you, Lynn?"

"Hm-m-m." That was the best Lynn could do.

"His record's busted," explained Sleepy, as he followed Hashknife outside, leaving others to explain to the sheriff. As they passed the hitch-rack near the Wild Horse saloon they saw Egg Flannigan mount his horse and ride out of town.

"That was kind of a fool thing to do—what I just did," said Hashknife. "But that's what usually happens when yuh butt in and try to stop a fight. Flannigan may be as crooked as a snake in a cactus patch, but he's a gentleman."

They got seats in a poker game at the Wild Horse, where the play was conservative, and it was almost morning when they cashed in their winnings. The crowd had dwindled considerably at the Greener, but the Five-Dot boys were still there, when Hashknife and Sleepy came in.

Coulter's voice was all right again, but there was a red welt above his silk muffler. He did not speak to Hashknife, but showed no enmity. He was sober, but a trifle red-eyed. Army and Jimmy were asleep in their chairs, and Silver Lining was propped up in a corner of the room near the pool-table, with a billiard-cue shoved up both pant-legs, and the hat on his lap filled with pool-balls. And some range wit had powdered his face with blue billiard-chalk, giving him an unearthly pallor.

Hashknife and Sleepy went to the restaurant where they found Thirsty Thurston, Frenchy O'Regan, Mike Larkin and several more of the Greener folks. Thirsty was mournfully drunk, and sang between mouthfuls:

"O-o-oh, I left my dar-r-rlin' Eller
In a grave besi-i-i-ide the se-e-e-e,
Where the breaker-r-rs roar
On a rocky sho-o-o-ore,
She'll never come back to me-e-e-e."

"I wish you'd go out, Thirsty," said Frenchy sadly. "You spoil my breakfast."

"Spoil mine, too," said Thirsty seriously. "I guess I'll go home. I felt shorry for Pete, 'cause he hurt his laig and couldn't ride to town; but I feel more shorry for me now. O-o-oh, I left my dar-r-r-rlin' Eller in a grave be-e-e-side—"

"F'r —— sake, let her alone!" exploded Frenchy. "There's lots of girls, Thirsty. Eller didn't have no corner on skirts."

"Ham an' egg, bacon, egg, libber 'n bacon, hot-cake, sma' steak, plune—" The Chinaman's menu chant was broken by an exclamation from the sheriff, who got to his feet.

PETE FALLS, bare-headed, dressed in an undershirt, overalls and boots, jerked up his horse in front of the restaurant and dismounted slowly. It was evident that Pete had traveled fast, as his bay horse was reeking with lather.

He limped toward the door, which was opened by the sheriff.

"Get a doctor, will yuh?" asked Pete wearily, grasping the door for support. "Somebody knocked —— out of Hunter."

"Shot him?" asked the sheriff.

"Naw; hit him on the head. I dunno how bad he's hurt, but he needs a doctor."

"I'll get one," offered Frenchy, and hurried away.

"How did it happen, Pete?" asked the sheriff.

"I dunno. His daughter come r'arin' down to the bunk-house a while ago, hammered on the door and told me to come out. She'd found her father in the corral, tied up. I got into some clothes and limped down there, and he sure was there.

"I helped her pack him to the house and

then I fogged out for here. I had a —— of a time saddlin' that bronc. Sleepin' kinda put a crimp in my bum leg."

Frenchy had passed the Greener saloon on his way after the doctor, and had yelled the information to Coulter, who came down to the restaurant.

"But what in —— was Hunter doin' at the corral?" demanded Coulter.

Pete spat dryly and rubbed his knee.

"I dunno. The lock is busted on the corral gate and them horses, except the pintos are gone. The two pinto broncs was out in the front yard when I left."

"More horse stealin', eh?" said the sheriff.

"Looks like it," nodded Pete. "They didn't take the pintos."

"They're branded K77," said Coulter meaningly. "We brought them over from the K77 yesterday—bought 'em from Flannigan."

"Well, we better get out there," decided the sheriff. "The doctor will come in his own rig."

Larkin and Coulter hurried away, and Pete limped toward the Greener saloon, leading his leg-weary horse, while Hashknife and Sleepy went back and finished their breakfast before getting their horses.

Quite a crowd had gathered at the Five-Dot ranch by the time Hashknife and Sleepy arrived. Hunter had been hit over the head with a blunt instrument, possibly a rifle or revolver barrel, and was still unconscious.

Mrs. Hunter explained that her husband had decided to hide near the corral and see if he couldn't capture the horse thieves. He had gone out there just after dark, and she supposed he was merely making a night of it. She had tried to persuade him not to do this, or to get Pete Falls to watch with him, but he wanted to go alone.

Not hearing anything from him, Grace had gone out to the corral early in the morning, only to find him bound and unconscious. She had immediately pounded on the bunk-house door, awakening Pete Falls, who had ridden to Greener.

The sheriff and Hashknife sauntered down to the corral and looked at the two pinto ponies, which some one had driven back into the corral. The padlock had been broken open.

"Just what started the trouble between Flannigan and Coulter last night?" asked the sheriff.

Hashknife told him as nearly as he could.

"And Flannigan said he was goin' to kick the gizzard out of Hunter, eh?"

"The next time they met," said Hashknife. "But that don't mean anythin', Larkin. Men are liable to make cracks like that."

"And then Flannigan got his horse and pulled out, eh?"

Hashknife nodded. Larkin sighed and shook his head. It was hard for him to make up his mind what to do. He went back to the house and questioned the doctor, but got little satisfaction. The doctor had no idea of how long Hunter had been injured.

"How's his chances to live?" asked Larkin.

"Hard to tell, Sheriff. We will have to wait and see. He has concussion of the brain, and it will take time to see how things develop."

Coulter came and talked to Hashknife and Sleepy, showing no anger over what had happened the night before. He seemed to blame himself for what had happened to Hunter.

"Hunter was an awful fool to do that alone," he declared. "It wasn't a one-man job. Well, mebbe he'll have more sense next time. Even if Pete was crippled, he could have been able to use a gun, and Hunter should have asked him to go along."

Coulter went back to the house and was on the porch, talking to Grace Hunter when Hashknife and Sleepy rode back toward Greener.

"What do yuh think of it?" asked Sleepy yawning.

"Gosh, I don't know. It's a cinch that this is one tough bunch of *hombres*, Sleepy. They don't stop at anythin'. I wish Hunter would recover enough to tell us what happened. Still they prob'ly popped him over the head, and about all he could identify would be a flock of stars."

"Kinda puts Flannigan in bad, don't it, Hashknife?"

"It sure does—especially if Hunter dies. Several men heard Flannigan say he was goin' to kick the gizzard out of Hunter; and then he rides away in the night. Let's go and see Flannigan."

"Yuh mean to warn him?"

"Not warn him—tell him."

THE K77 ranch lay southeast of the Five-Dot, and they were able to cut across the hills, avoiding Greener, and strike the K77 road about a mile below the town. They knew the location of the ranch, although they had never been there.

Navajo Clark, a little, undersized cowpuncher, met them, and explained that Flannigan was still asleep.

"Has Thurston come home yet?" asked Hashknife.

"Nope. Prob'ly drunk as a boiled-owl," Navajo spat disgustedly. "He allus gits drunk on pay-day. I used to. Got snakes once and it shore cured me. I'll wake Flannigan up, if yuh say so."

"I wish yuh would," said Hashknife. "Tell him Hartley wants to see him."

"Aw right."

Navajo bow-legged his way into the house and in a few minutes Flannigan came out, half dressed, carrying the rest of his clothes in one hand.

"Howdy," he grinned. "Navajo said yuh wanted to see me. Why in —— didn't he tell yuh to git down and sit?"

"Prob'ly thought we had that much sense," laughed Hashknife, as he dismounted. Flannigan clawed his way into his shirt and waited for Hashknife to start the conversation.

"We cut across from the Five-Dot road," said Hashknife. "Last night George Hunter decided to watch some horses in their corral, and among them were the two pinto ponies they bought from you."

Flannigan nodded quickly.

"Yeah, I sold 'em."

"And this mornin'," continued Hashknife, "they found Hunter inside the corral, tied up tight and with a busted head."

Flannigan opened his mouth, as though about to speak, but closed it and cleared his throat harshly.

"Lemme get this straight, Hartley."

Hashknife repeated it, while Flannigan scratched his jaw thoughtfully.

"And all the horses, except the two pintos, were gone," added Sleepy.

"Yeah? Is Hunter hurt very bad?"

"Concussion of the brain."

"More likely concussion of the head.

"Hm-m-m." He squinted at Hashknife. "You cut across the hills to tell me about it?"

"I thought yuh might like to know it, Flannigan."

Flannigan laughed shortly.

"Because I said I'd kick the gizzard out of Hunter the next time we met?"

"Somethin' like that."

Flannigan sighed and rubbed a hand on his hip. For several moments he stared down at the ground without lifting his head. Then he shrugged his shoulders and looked up.

"Much obliged, Hartley. Hunter accused me of stealin' horses, and that's why I was sore. If he'd had a gun at that time, I'd 'a' killed him. When I heard that he had demanded the arrest of Dean Walker and Frosty Hedges, I came to Dad Walker and offered him my help. That offer still stands.

"I realize what I'm up against. I can't prove anythin'. Navajo was asleep when I came home. I left Greener early, as you know. Like a fool, I talked too much. Anyway, I'm obliged to yuh, boys. If Hunter dies, there's enough circumstantial evidence to make things bad for me."

"It don't look any too good," agreed Hashknife. "Well, we'll be bobbin' along, Flannigan. We didn't get any sleep last night, and I hear the blankets callin'."

"All right, boys. Much obliged for the advance information. It'll save the sheriff from wastin' his breath. Come over again."

They rode away from the K77, following down the slopes of Wheeler Creek, which would bring them to the Greener road at a point near where the stage had been held up. It was the shortest way back to the Bar 3.

They reached the road on the Greener side of the creek, but rode back to the crossing. The creek bottom was very brushy, while the hills surrounding it were comparatively open. Cottonwoods and willows grew in profusion, as the creek spread here, making it a marshy spot.

The robbers had selected a good spot to stop the stage, as the willows made excellent cover, and the driver would be going slow at this point. Hashknife looked the place over carefully.

"They prob'ly left their horses in the brushy bottom," he said thoughtfully. "And the getaway cover is better down the stream."

Sleepy said nothing, but followed Hashknife, who had dismounted and was leading his horse. Because of the number of loose horses in the country, many of which came to Wheeler Creek for water, it would be impossible to trail the robbers.

About a hundred yards below the road was an open space, where the ground was slightly higher. Hashknife halted at the center of this slight elevation and looked around, while Sleepy lolled in his saddle and wished he was back at the ranch.

Suddenly his eyes focused on something on the ground, and he dismounted to pick up a loaded rifle cartridge. Together they examined it closely. It was a 40-82 caliber, slightly discolored from a few days' exposure.

They searched the opening closely, but found nothing more.

"Do yuh reckon it means anythin'?" asked Sleepy.

"Yuh never can tell." Hashknife put the cartridge in his pocket. "This looks like the place I'd pick out to leave my horse if I was goin' to stick up the stage. This ground is too hard to leave tracks, and they'd naturally ride this way, 'cause the brush plays out on 'em above here, except along the water."

"And they prob'ly lost that shell here."

"Mebbe. Hurried too much. Stage was prob'ly comin'; so they loaded their guns real fast, dropped a shell and never missed it. It ain't much as evidence, but every little bit helps. We might as well head for home, or take some sticks and prop our eyes open."

They mounted and rode back toward the Bar 3. Several Five-Dot horses were grazing through a wide, open swale, and they stopped to look them over. The Five-Dot brand consisted of four corner and one center dot, covering a square of about six inches, and was placed on the right shoulder of the animal.

The Bar 3 also branded on the right shoulder, but the K77 was on the left hip. They saw quite a number of K77 horses, on the way back to the ranch, but few wearing the Bar 3.

"I reckon they've just about cleaned out Dad Walker," observed Hashknife. "If I owned this ranch I'd run cattle."

"Yeah, and somebody'd steal 'em," grunted Sleepy wearily. "If I owned a cow in this country, I'd house-break the danged thing."

They locked their horses in the stable and went to the house. There was no warning on the door; all was serene.

"From now on," said Hashknife, as they pulled off their boots, "we go kinda easy. Hell hath no fury like a horse thief scorned."

They crawled in to bed and slept until late in the afternoon, when Mike Larkin rode in at the ranch and woke them up. His horse had not been fed that day; so Hashknife had him put it in the stable and pull down some hay.

MIKE had not been out to the K77. He sat down in the living-room of the ranch-house and talked about Hunter's injury.

"He's pretty bad," declared Larkin. "Mrs. Hunter ain't got a lot of confidence in our doctor; so Coulter advised her to send to Sacramento for a specialist. She decided to do it, and Coulter sent Bean and Ashlock to Roper with a telegram.

"My gosh, half the world could die before a doctor could get here from Sacramento. I talked with old Doc Gilson about it and he said to let 'em go ahead."

"What do you think of the deal?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno, Hartley. I s'pose the best thing for me to do is to resign my office. I'm too cautious. If I wasn't I'd go out and arrest Egg Flannigan, charge him with murderous assault and do my dangdest to convict him."

"Hunter accused him of stealin' horses," smiled Hashknife.

"I know it."

"It's kinda funny about the horse thieves leavin' them two pinto horses, don'tcha think?" asked Sleepy.

"Mm-m-m. Well, of course, them pinto ponies might be hard to dispose of."

The sheriff was outspoken with his suspicions. He did not believe that Dean Walker and Frosty Hedges were guilty, and he did not believe that Flannigan had knocked Hunter down and stolen the horses.

"Egg Flannigan is a wild sort of a jigger and he'd swap lead with the devil; but I don't think he'd sneak up and hit any man on the head."

"Kinda looks like a deadlock," grinned Sleepy.

"It shore is, Stevens. I've filled my head with gray hairs in one year. I used to laugh quite a lot, but now I swear. There's a new election in November, and I wish my opponent luck."

Sleepy prepared a meal and the sheriff promised to stay and partake of it.

"Ain't goin' no place," he said dolefully.

"Just kinda run around in a circle; so I might as well be here as there."

It was almost sundown when they finished their meal, and the sheriff had decided to go back to the Five-Dot. Sleepy cleared away the dishes, while Hashknife started down toward the stable with the sheriff.

Suddenly there came a sound; like a man might make in striking his chest with his fist—a muffled thud. The sheriff gasped chokingly, staggered sideways two or three steps and fell on his face.

Hashknife whirled and darted back toward the house, while the surrounding hills echoed to the whip-like snap of a rifle shot. He darted in through the kitchen doorway, picking up a rifle as he ran, and bumped to a stop at a front window.

Sleepy came running behind him, grasped a rifle from off the center-table, and flung open the other front window.

"Got the sheriff!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Long shot, Sleepy. Watch for him to ride off that hill."

But there was no sign of the shooter. Hashknife had a fairly good idea of where the shot came from, but could not be sure. For several minutes they watched the hill. Then Hashknife drew away from his window.

"Keep yore eye peeled, Sleepy. It was a black-powder cartridge, from the report; so you watch for smoke."

Hashknife went out through the kitchen and ran rapidly toward the stable. He was barely half way across the open space when a bullet hummed past him and *pwee-e-e-d* off a rock near the corral.

As Hashknife skidded around the corner of the stable he heard Sleepy shooting as fast as he could work the lever of his Winchester. Hashknife ran back to the corner. He heard Sleepy calling his name.

"All safe, pardner!" he yelled back. "Give him ——!"

Sleepy did not reply, but started shooting again. The man on the hill had evidently located Sleepy. A puff of smoke, the tinkle of breaking glass, followed by the echoing report, showed that the man had hit the window.

"All right?" yelled Hashknife.

"—— glass-buster!" whooped Sleepy.

Hashknife grinned and drew down on the spot where the man had been, and fired twice in quick succession. But the answering shot came from a point several yards beyond. The man was able to change his location without being seen.

Hashknife fired at the smoke. The opening range had been about three hundred yards, but now it was increased about fifty yards. "He's movin' back!" yelled Sleepy, and was rewarded by a bullet through the upper pane of his window.

The smoke of the shot showed that the man was still moving back; so Hashknife selected a point farther on and sent three shots, with his sights set at four hundred yards.

Either the man had been hit or did not care to swap more lead with them, was their decision after a fifteen minutes' wait. Hashknife walked across the yard, inviting disaster in order to see if the man was still anxious to kill somebody, but nothing happened.

Sleepy came from the house and helped carry the body of Mike Larkin into the house. The sheriff was dead—killed instantly. It was growing dark now; too dark for a bushwhacker to do any accurate shooting; so they strapped Larkin's body on one of the Bar 3 horses and headed for Greener.

"This has got past the joke stage," said Hashknife seriously. "Whoever that jigger is, he didn't know the sheriff was at the ranch."

"Yeah, and he can shoot," declared Sleepy. "Every danged shot he fired at me came through the window. They were all about two feet too high, which showed that he wasn't guessin' a lot. And that kind of shootin' with a black-powder gun, in that light, shows me con-clu-sively that he ain't no danged ordinary trigger-yanker."

"Well," said Hashknife sadly, "poor Larkin won't have to resign. He never felt it hit him, that's a cinch. Went plumb through him. And lemme tell yuh, cowboy, that pelican almost got yore little friend when he ran across the yard."

"Well, we'll try and find out who is the best shot in this danged range, Hashknife. They don't breed many like that feller."

In spite of the fact that this man had tried to kill them, they appreciated his marksmanship. They realized that they were up against men who would stop at nothing to eliminate them from the Wild Horse range; men who would shoot from ambush; whose identity and movements were unknown.

"Anyway," said Hashknife philosophically, "we've got 'em scared of us."

"Which sure as —— gives us a big advantage." Sleepy was inclined to sarcasm. "We ain't scared, are we, Hashknife? Oh, no! My ——, if somebody sneezed I wouldn't even wait to take my horse along. To me there ain't a lot of satisfaction in layin' quiet with a lily in my hand and hearin' folks say, 'There's one nice thing about it—he never knowed what hit him.'"

The bringing in of the dead sheriff caused a sensation in Greener, where he was well liked. The doctor and Lynn Coulter had just arrived from the Five-Dot; so the body was turned over to the doctor. Hashknife told the story of the shooting, but did not intimate that the bullet had probably been intended for himself or Sleepy. Frenchy O'Regan was so shocked by the sheriff's death that he had nothing whatever to say.

Men gathered in little groups to talk it over, and Hashknife had a feeling that many did not believe his story. This feeling was strengthened when Frenchy O'Regan came to him and drew him aside.

"Are you goin' back to the Bar 3?" asked Frenchy.

"Yeah—why not?"

"Got room for me to sleep tonight?"

"Y'betcha."

No one objected to their riding away, but Frenchy explained that there had been too much talk to suit him.

"Some of them —— fools think you shot Mike."

"Yeah?" Hashknife smiled g r i m l y. "Nothin', except our word to prove we didn't, Frenchy."

"Uh-huh. Some of 'em think you held up that stage, too."

"What do you think?"

"It kinda had me pawin' my head," admitted Frenchy. "Mike wired the secretary of the Cattle Association, askin' Stilwell if you two was detectives. He got a wire back, sayin' that you wasn't in any way connected."

"Larkin showed us the wire," nodded Hashknife.

"But he didn't show yuh the other telegram he got. It told Mike to keep his nose out of your business, but to back yore play, no matter what yuh done."

"And poor Larkin was mistaken for one of us," said Hashknife.

"I thought that was it. That bunch in Greener will prob'ly drink a lot of liquor and talk big; but I don't think they'll do anythin' mean. If you don't mind, I'd kind a like to stay with yuh until we find out somethin'. I ain't got much brains, but an extra gun might be useful. Yuh see, I'm sheriff now."

"Be glad to have yuh, Frenchy," said Hashknife. "Yo're takin' a big chance."

"Can't come too soon to suit me, Hartley. I kinda liked old Mike Larkin."

IV

THAT night four horses, including Hunter's favorite driving-horse, were stolen from the Five-Dot stable. A broken lock attested to the fact that a locked stable was of no avail.

Hunter was conscious again, but Coulter would not tell him of the theft for fear of exciting the patient. Hunter seemed to remember hearing some one behind him, just before the blow was struck, but did not see any one.

The doctor had gone back to the Five-Dot, following the killing of the sheriff, and was there when Hunter regained consciousness. He cautioned every one against telling Hunter too much; so the loss of the horses was not mentioned.

"My gees, this shore is gettin' to be a awful community," declared Silver Lining, when told of the murder of Larkin. "I'm shore glad I ain't got no authority over anythin', except aigs and stews."

A lean-jawed, stoop-shouldered cowboy, with a huge quid of tobacco bulging one cheek, had ridden up to the bunk-house and was talking to Pete Falls. Coulter had been standing in the kitchen door, talking with Silver Lining, but now he went down to the bunk-house to see who the stranger might be.

"I was lookin' for Jimmy Ashlock," the stranger told Coulter.

"He ain't here," replied Coulter. "Him and Bean went out to Roper, and they ain't back yet."

"I told him that," said Pete.

"Uh-huh." The stranger spat thoughtfully. "I jist rode in from up north, and thought I might see Jimmy. He's m' cousin."

"Is yore name Allison?" asked Pete.

"Yeah. Abe Allison's m' name."

"I've heard Jimmy speak of you," said

Coulter. "You was with the JMK, wasn't yuh?"

"Yeah."

"So Jimmy said."

"What's he say about me?" Allison seemed curious.

Coulter laughed.

"Nothin' very bad, Allison. Yore name came up the other day. We were talkin' about a couple of strange cow punchers. Jimmy made a statement, and said he could prove it by you."

"Prove what by me?"

"Somethin' about their reputation. Their names are Hartley and Stevens."

Allison sat up straight in his saddle, looking wonderingly at Coulter and Falls.

"What about 'em?" he asked slowly.

"Oh, I dunno. Somethin' about 'em bein' square, I reckon."

"By ——, you bet they are!" Allison fairly bristled. "Who in —— said they wasn't square?"

"Nobody," laughed Coulter. "Anyway, we never said it, Allison."

"Tell me who did, will yuh?"

"Nope. The argument is settled, as far as we're concerned."

"Uh-huh," Allison squinted thoughtfully. "They ain't in this country, are they?"

"They're at the Bar 3," replied Coulter. "Last night they brought in the body of Mike Larkin, the sheriff."

"Yeah? Dead?"

"Shot dead center. Some folks seem to kinda have the idea that Hartley and Stevens done it."

"The —— they did! Was this sheriff a crook?"

"Nope. I reckon Larkin was square as a die."

"Then they never shot him," declared Allison. "If he was a crook, and needed shootin', I'll betcha they done it. Yuh say they work at the Bar 3? Where's that?"

"On the other side of Greener."

"Hm-m-m. Well, by golly, I'll shore be glad to meet 'em. I'm not so sure how they'll greet Abe Allison, but I'll take a chance. If Jimmy shows up here before I see him, jist tell him that I'll be hangin' around for a few days, will yuh?"

"Sure will," agreed Coulter.

Allison rode away toward Greener, and Coulter sat down on the bunk-house steps with Falls.

"I wonder what Hartley and Stevens done for that jigger," said Falls. "He's shore a salty lookin' pilgrim."

"Won't win any beauty prize," smiled Coulter. "More gun than brains. You ain't seen Hunter, have yuh, Pete?"

"Naw. The doctor said he didn't want anybody to excite him. What'd he have to say about gettin' busted on the head?"

"Very little. Heard somebody and then saw a lot of stars. It took a hard head to recover from that smash. I'll have to send one of the boys back to Roper to wire that specialist. Hunter won't need him now. Maybe I better ride to Greener and meet 'em. It'll save time. I can tell Frenchy about the missing horses. He's sheriff now."

BUT Frenchy was not interested just now in missing horses. He and Hashknife and Sleepy were searching through the brush, where the bushwhacker had hidden the night before. They had started their search early in the morning, and it was Hashknife who made the first discovery.

It was a brass cartridge shell. A short search netted him seven more of the same caliber. He called to Frenchy and Sleepy, who scrambled down through the brush and sat down with him.

"Who shoots a 40-82?" asked Hashknife.

Frenchy squinted at the shells closely and rubbed his chin.

"All 40-82's, eh?" he grunted. "By golly, that's funny."

"What's funny?" asked Hashknife.

Frenchy deliberated for several moments, as though debating what to do. Finally he lifted his head and looked at Hashknife.

"There's only one 40-82 in this country—that I know about. I traded it to Flannigan for a Colt six-gun three months ago."

"Yuh did? I wonder if he's still got it?"

"Had it a month ago, Hartley. I'll tell yuh how I know. It was a danged good gun. Flannigan is quite a rifle shot and he tried it out one day at the K77. It kinda struck him good; so we made a trade.

"About a month ago we pulled off a shoot in Greener. Flannigan won first money with that 40-82. There was quite a lot of shooters, but Flannigan beat 'em all out. And I know danged well that there wasn't another 40-82 at the shoot. Why, Flannigan had to buy his shells in Roper, 'cause the store at Greener didn't carry 'em."

Hashknife examined the shells closely, a

frown on his brow, and after an examination of each one he sat silent for several minutes, while Frenchy and Sleepy rolled cigarets and rested from their climb.

Finally Hashknife put the shells in his pocket and drew out his tobacco, a half smile on his face.

"It kinda looks like we'd have to visit Flannigan, eh?" said Frenchy.

"It does look thataway," agreed Hashknife. "But suppose we don't do it yet? Flannigan ain't goin' to run away. I've got some fool ideas to work on, and it won't help me none to rush right in and arrest somebody.

"Yuh must remember, Frenchy—the Winchester folks made more than one 40-82. In fact, I've been places where yuh couldn't hardly find anythin' else. A rifle caliber is a hard thing to convict anybody on. Suppose we let Flannigan alone for a while. If yuh want to keep an eye on him, all right."

"——, I'm follerin' yore play," grunted Frenchy. "The telegram said for us to back yore play, and I'll do my darndest."

Hashknife rubbed out the fire on his cigaret and led the way farther around on the hillside. He stopped and looked at the ranch-house for a moment, before proceeding toward a heavier clump of brush. He circled the upper side of this and stopped about midway of the clump.

Frenchy and Sleepy crowded in behind him and looked down at the body of a bay horse, its lead-rope still tied to a snag. Frenchy swore softly and slid down beside the horse.

"That's where my last two shots landed, Sleepy," said Hashknife. "I shore ruined his rollin' stock for him."

The horse was lying on its right side, and on the right shoulder was a big burned spot, where a brand had been blotted.

"Five-Dot or Bar 3," declared Frenchy, running his hand over the burn.

"Let's turn him over," suggested Hashknife. It was no task to turn over the stiffened carcass, which disclosed another blotted brand on the left hip. Frenchy scratched his head foolishly.

"Or a K77," he said foolishly. "Whatcha know about that?"

They examined the horse for other marks, but there were none. It was impossible to tell what the brands had been, but it seemed that the horse had been branded twice, and both brands blotted.

For an hour or more they searched the hill, but could find nothing more.

"Must 'a' packed his saddle away on his back," decided Frenchy.

Hashknife shook his head, "I don't think he rode a saddle, Frenchy. That jigger was too wise. He had his horse fixed so nobody could identify it, and he was taking no chance on losing a saddle. Nossir, that person rode light and free."

"And he sure as —— can shoot," added Sleepy.

They went back to the ranch-house and got their horses. Frenchy was obviously nervous over the prospect of some one taking another shot at them, and did not breathe easy until they were in the stable.

"You don't know when yore time has come, do yuh?" asked Hashknife seriously. Frenchy shook his head.

"Nobody does, do they?" he asked.

"Not a —— one," declared Hashknife. "So yuh might as well hang on to yore nerve and quit lookin' back. Me and Sleepy have been shot at so many times that we won't hardly take the trouble to step aside from a bullet."

"I seen Sleepy look back," declared Frenchy.

"Me?" Sleepy turned from cinching his saddle and stared at Frenchy with simulated astonishment. "You seen me look back?"

"I shore did."

"Oh, yeah," Sleepy laughed. "I thought I heard a shot behind me; so I turned to see if the bullet was worth dodgin'."

Hashknife chuckled and slapped Frenchy on the shoulder.

"Frenchy, we're just as scared as you are. —— knows, I'm as touchy as anybody, and my vertebrae crinkle up so bad that I can't hardly stoop over when I feel that somebody is goin' to plug me from behind. I'm scared, I tell yuh.

"I'd rather be anywhere than here in these hills. They're after us, and the odds are all against us; but we can't drop it. I used to know a feller who couldn't help trompin' on a rattlesnake. It didn't make no difference where he heard one buzz, he jist has to go and tromp it to death.

"He'd jist kinda go loco for a minute, and his face would get as white as snow; but tromp it he must. That's the way with us, Frenchy. We're scared plumb white, but we've got to tromp —— out of these mangy coyotes."

"What became of that feller?" asked Frenchy.

"Well," said Hashknife sadly, "he got out of bed one mornin' and shook a rattler out of his blanket. He didn't have no boots on. Some day they'll catch us with our boots off, too."

THEY strung out in single-file and rode rapidly to Greener, but no shots were fired from the brushy hills. They tied their horses to the Greener saloon rack and went in to the saloon.

Abe Allison was standing at the bar, talking to Bean and Ashlock, who had just ridden in from Roper. Allison took one look at Hashknife and a wide grin spread his tobacco-stained lips. He surged away from the bar and came toward Hashknife, his right hand reaching for a handshake.

"By ——, I'm glad to see yuh ag'in!" he ha f-shouted, as Hashknife accepted his hand. "Holy cats, it shore is good to look at yuh, Hartley. Uh-h-h-huh!"

"I'm glad to see you, Allison," grinned Hashknife. "How's everythin' with you?"

"Finer'n frawg-hair. By golly, here's Stevens! C'mere and let me paw yuh around."

Sleepy laughed and shook hands with him.

Allison slapped his old hat on the bar and invited everybody to have a drink with him.

"You fellers have met Hartley and Stevens, ain't yuh?" he asked Bean and Ashlock. "Well, yuh never met anythin' better. Bartender, give 'em the best yuh got."

They drank and rolled their cigarets.

"You fellers workin' around here?" asked Allison.

"Out at the Bar 3," said Hashknife. "Thinkin' of buyin' it out."

"Thasso? Say, will yuh give me a job, if yuh buy it?"

"Mebbe."

"Did I hear yuh say you've been with the JMK outfit?" Thus the bartender, a portly soul, who wheezed asthmatically.

"Yeah, I was with 'em," said Allison.

"Didn't happen to run across Buck Keen up there, didja?"

"He wasn't with the JMK. He used to punch for the TR, but he quit them quite a long time ago. He's got a shack in Cottonwood Valley, and he told me he was going to kill wolves for a livin'. That country is plumb lousy with wolves."

"Larry Elkins ain't with him, eh?" said Frenchy.

"No. They ain't been together much since they left the Five-Dot. Larry's runnin' the Box 8, up across the line. I seen Larry about two weeks ago. He bought a few feeders from the JMK."

"Foreman, eh?" asked the bartender.

"Yeah. It ain't a very big outfit. Say, somebody said that a bunch of horse thieves were raisin' —— down here."

"If yuh don't think they are—leave yore bronc handy," grinned Ashlock. "Me and Army has been takin' our broncs in the house with us."

Allison laughed loudly and ordered another round of drinks.

"Gotta celebrate," he declared. "These two men," indicating Hashknife and Sleepy, "can have anythin' I've got. By golly, they don't even have to ask me for it."

"You ain't put up no place yet, have yuh?" asked Hashknife.

"Me?" Allison laughed. "—— that's the last thing I ever worry about. Why?"

"I thought yuh might like to come out to the Bar 3 for a few days."

"Say, I'll do it."

The conversation was interrupted when Lynn Coulter came in. He nodded to everybody and spoke directly to Ashlock.

"I reckon you fellers will have to go back to Roper again. I'll write yuh a wire. Hunter's gettin' along fine, and don't need the specialist; so we've got to stop him."

Frenchy questioned Coulter, who told them that Hunter had regained consciousness, but could tell them nothing. Coulter urged Bean and Ashlock to make the return trip as soon as possible, and wrote out the telegram for them.

They went out with Coulter. Allison seemed determined to get drunk, but Hashknife, Sleepy and Frenchy refused to keep him company.

"All right, we'll all quit then," said Allison. "Let's go out to the Bar 3, where we can sit down and talk."

Sleepy declared that he was out of tobacco and was going to the store before he left. Hashknife nudged Frenchy and signaled him to go with Sleepy, while he walked to the hitch-rack with Allison.

"Allison, will you do me a favor?" asked Hashknife, as they leaned on the rack.

" 'F I never do another thing in my life," said Allison seriously. "I owe you and Stevens a —— of a lot. You saved me from the rope, and I ain't forgettin' it, Hartley. Gimme the job."

HASHKNIFE took out his notebook, tore out a leaf and wrote a note with the stub of a lead-pencil. Then he took out another leaf and composed another note. Allison squinted narrowly while Hashknife explained what he wanted done.

He did not ask any questions, but tucked the notes into a pocket of his old vest and nodded understandingly.

"It'll sure be a big favor, Allison," said Hashknife. "Keep mum, and come back to the Bar 3."

"Unless somebody shoots me," grinned Allison. "Ever since that day in Lo Lo Valley I've wondered how in —— I'd ever pay you fellers back. I'm glad yuh wanted somethin' done."

"This will even the score, Allison."

"Like —— it will," Allison swung into his saddle and bit off a big chew of tobacco. "So long and good luck, Hartley."

He rode out of town, as Frenchy and Sleepy came from the store, and they looked questioningly at Hashknife.

"He's gone for a ride," said Hashknife grinning.

"Uh-huh," nodded Sleepy. "I knowed yuh was up to somethin' when yuh nudged Frenchy into goin' with me." He turned to the sheriff. "That's Hashknife Hartley, Frenchy. I foller him around like a hound-pup, thasall. He won't tell yuh a danged thing.

"When he starts thinkin' real deep-like, I oil my gun. When he starts singin', I pull the gun half way out and cock it. I tell yuh, it's a terrible existence—terrible!"

"Didja buy me some Durham?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah, I bought yuh some. I tried to buy some 40-82 shells at the store, but they didn't have any. The clerk said there wasn't any call for 'em."

"I tell yuh there's only one 40-82 in the country," said Frenchy. "Everybody knows that."

"Everybody knows that everybody knows," grinned Hashknife.

"What do yuh mean?" asked Frenchy.

"Aw-w-w, let's go home," growled Sleepy. "You'll never get an intelligible answer from the bed-slat."

As they started out of town Dad Walker drove in, leaving Dean and Frosty's saddle horses. They drew up and waited for him. The old man looked wearily at them, but smiled his greeting. He had heard of Larkin's death.

"I thought I might as well bring the horses home," he said. "Livery bills run kinda high. The trial will begin in three days; so me and Ma will stay down there. I'll take the stage back in the mornin'."

"Didja try to get bail for the boys?" asked Frenchy.

"Yeah, I could. But the trial would start too soon to bother with it, and 'Happy' Davis, the jailer, is good to the boys."

"He better be," said Frenchy. "I'll fire that son-of-a-gun, if he don't run that jail right, y'betcha."

"How does everythin' look?" asked Hashknife.

"Not very good, Hartley. We have no defense, and the prosecution has very little to work on; but nobody ever knows what a jury will do. Lost any horses since I left?"

"I don't know, Dad. After lookin' around, I don't reckon you've got many more to lose."

"I sure ain't. Goin' to the ranch, Frenchy?"

"Sure," Frenchy laughed. "I'm livin' out there now."

"Fine. Well, let's go home and feel sorry where we can be comfortable."

THE following morning Dad Walker, Frenchy O'Regan and Sleepy rode back to Greener. Dad Walker rode Hashknife's horse, for the simple reason that the horse thieves, sometime during the night, had decamped with the four Bar 3 horses, leaving the three belonging to Hashknife, Sleepy and Frenchy.

And pinned to the stable-door was this message:

We have quit foolin' git out. You wont live 2 days long if you stay here.

Hashknife sat on the front steps of the ranch-house and compared the writing with that of the former warning. Both had been written with a lead-pencil, but not by the same man. The last message was hardly decipherable.

"This one wasn't prepared ahead of time," mused Hashknife. "They wasn't sure of a chance to use it; so they wrote it kinda by guess, and in the dark, it looks like."

He was smoking and musing over the latest horse stealing, when Flannigan rode in past the corral fence and up to the porch. Hashknife waved a greeting to him and he dismounted.

"Are yuh all alone?" asked Flannigan.

Hashknife told him what had happened to the Bar 3 horses and showed him the warnings. Flannigan looked them over carefully before handing them back.

"Didja ever see that handwritin' before?" asked Hashknife.

Flannigan shook his head.

"Nope."

"You heard what happened to the sheriff, didn't yuh?"

"I did. I wondered if that bullet wasn't intended for you."

"For me or Sleepy," nodded Hashknife.

"Hunter's recoverin' nicely, I hear."

"Yeah. Say, Flannigan, you shoot a 40-82, don'tcha?"

Flannigan looked closely at Hashknife, but nodded.

"Where is that rifle?"

"At the ranch."

"Uh-huh." Hashknife rubbed his chin and squinted narrowly at Flannigan. "Didja know that Mike Larkin was killed by a 40-82?"

"Is that so?" Flannigan's jaw shut tightly and his eyes looked speculatively at his cigaret. "A 40-82, eh?"

Hashknife did not reply. Finally Flannigan looked at him, inhaling slowly from his cigaret.

"You know, Hartley," he said slowly, "I own the only rifle of that caliber in this country."

"I heard yuh did. I found a 40-82 cartridge down there near where the stage was held up."

Flannigan ground the light off his cigaret against the step and leaned back easily.

"I've got a good alibi on that holdup, Hartley. It ain't hard for me to prove that I was at the ranch at the time."

"I know it," Hashknife smiled softly. "Do yuh think I'd be tellin' yuh all this, if I thought yuh was guilty?"

"Thank yuh, Hartley. But who else has got a 40-82?"

"That remains to be seen. The Five-Dot outfit think yo're guilty, don't they?"

Flannigan flushed slightly.

"Hunter does. I dunno how the rest of 'em feel about it—and I don't care a ——. Anyway, Hunter is goin' to sell out. I reckon he's had enough, and it's a cinch we won't miss him none."

"Goin' to sell out?" queried Hashknife.

"Yeah. I met Coulter on the road early this mornin', headin' for Roper to get out the notices. He said that Hunter was sick of the proposition and wanted to sell. They're goin' to bring all their horses to Greener and auction 'em off. I don't suppose he'll auction off the ranch itself, but he's goin' to quit raisin' horses."

"Well, that's sure news," grunted Hashknife. "When does this sale take place?"

"Next Saturday afternoon, so Coulter said."

"Well, that's sure funny!" exclaimed Hashknife.

"What's funny?"

"I can't tell yuh, Flannigan—but it sure is funny. Will it be much of a sale?"

"I dunno how many horses they've got. Hunter raised some pretty good stock; but of course he's lost a lot. There'll be plenty of buyers if the word gets scattered wide enough. There's quite a few horse raisers north of here."

Flannigan did not stay much longer, but thanked Hashknife again for coming to warn him of the suspicions against him for the assault on Hunter.

"Do yuh want me to see if I can find out who's got a 40-82?" he asked.

"No-o-o," drawled Hashknife. "Just forget it, Flannigan. Yo're sure that gun is still at yore ranch, ain't yuh?"

"It hangs beside my bed."

"All right. Don't mention it to anybody."

"Does Frenchy O'Regan know?"

"Yeah, he knows."

"Well, I dunno what it's all about," Flannigan shook his head and gathered up his reins. "Mebbe you know what yo're doin'."

"Mebbe," grinned Hashknife. "It's kinda unusual for me to know what I'm doin'—but this time I feel lucky. When yo're lookin' for a horse thief—go and mentally steal a few horses. Figure out how to make a bronc disappear. There's only a few ways of makin' a horse vanish, Flannigan."

"I reckon so." Flannigan seemed dubious. "Anyway, I'll sure be indebted to yuh, if yuh can find out who's doin' it."

Flannigan rode away and Hashknife looked after him, a grin on his face.

"I'll betcha I know why they never stole yore horses," he said to himself. "The K77 is the key to the arch, and when it falls somebody is goin' to get tunked on the head."

Hashknife went back in the house and stretched out on a couch. The window across the room was open, braced from the bottom with a stick. As he stretched out his gaze wandered to the brushy hills several hundred yards away.

SUDDENLY he caught a flash of something moving. It might have been an animal, passing through the brush, but he got to his feet and went close to the window. It did not appear again. He went to the open door, without exposing himself, and studied the hills.

It was possibly five minutes later that he saw it again. This time he was sure it was a man. He marked the spot and went back for his rifle, setting his sights for three hundred yards. From the window he studied the spot again, straining his eyes for another glimpse of the man in the brush. He drew up a chair and settled down to wait, but the man refused to show himself.

There was no doubt in his mind that this man was watching the house, probably waiting for an opportunity to kill somebody. Hashknife studied the possibility of sneaking away from the house and approaching the ambush, but he knew that there was too much open space.

"Well, darn yuh, I'll see what yo're there for," decided Hashknife. "There's more than one way to skin a cat."

He took a blanket from the bed and proceeded to make a crude dummy, with the aid of a pair of overalls and a coat. Around this he tied a rope, hung his hat atop the blanket-roll, and tied the whole thing to a broom.

Then he moved in beside the doorway and shoved the dummy into the opening.

"Look like a man, dang yore woolen head!" he grunted.

As if in answer to his demand, the dummy jerked quickly and a bullet scored the wall inside the room. Hashknife dropped the dummy, which sprawled on the porch, and quickly peered around the corner. A tiny cloud of smoke drifted away from a spot on the hill-side.

Quickly Hashknife jerked back and ran to the window, picking up his rifle.

"That old snag!" he grunted. "Just to the left of it."

The window was raised hardly high enough for the elevation needed; so he lifted it cautiously, dropped down just a trifle and cuddled the rifle stock to his cheek. And just as the front bead notched on the exact spot, and the finger squeezed softly—the window dropped like the knife of a guillotine, and the bullet tore into the yard about twenty feet away.

Hashknife swore viciously tugged at the rifle, but was forced to lift the window to release the gun. He ran to the doorway, keeping himself concealed, but could see nothing. He knew that there was no use trying to locate the man now.

Without a horse he had no chance, and the man knew that there would be no chance to get another open shot. Hashknife left the dummy on the porch, while he sat down and swore at the window, which had spoiled his aim.

Then the humor of the thing struck him and he chuckled softly. He wondered what the man in the brush thought, when he heard the report, but no bullet came his way. He was still chuckling when he heard somebody swear wonderingly, and got to his feet as Sleepy and Frenchy came up to the door, looking curiously at the dummy.

"Come inside before somebody shoots yuh!" yelled Hashknife, and the two men fairly fell inside the room. Sleepy grasped the corner of a table and squinted at Hashknife.

"You danged old pelican, we thought that was you on the porch. We wasn't halfway down the hill before we seen it, and I'm tellin' you, it was the longest trip I ever made."

"Who done the shootin'?" demanded Frenchy. "We was a long ways back up the road, but we heard two shots."

Hashknife grinned widely, as he detailed his experience with the dummy and the falling window, while Sleepy and Frenchy whooped with mirth at Hashknife's description. Sleepy pulled the dummy off the porch and they examined it. The bullet had hit just about midway of the dummy.

"By golly, that dirty pup shore can shoot," declared Sleepy.

"And there's just one man in this country who can shoot that straight," said Frenchy.

"He was here after you left," said Hashknife. "We had quite a talk."

"Flannigan?"

"Yeah. He rode away toward home just a little while before I got a glimpse of this bushwhacker."

Frenchy got to his feet and started for the door.

"Where yuh goin'?" asked Sleepy.

"I'm goin' to the K77. If Flannigan ain't there, I'm goin' to wait for him."

"Set down," growled Hashknife. "You don't want Flannigan."

"Why don't I?" demanded Frenchy. "You just said—"

"I said he was here, thasall. He never bushwhacked me. He says his 40-82 is hangin' beside his bunk at home."

"Oh, he said that, did he? Uh-huh," Frenchy scratched his head reflectively. "Well, I dunno. Mebbe you know what yo're doin'. You take anybody's word, don'tcha?"

"I believe a few things," grinned Hashknife. "You promised to back my play, Frenchy. Didja hear that Hunter is sellin' out?"

He hadn't. They had only stayed in Greener long enough to see Dad Walker on the stage, and had talked to no one. Hashknife told them what Flannigan had said, but Frenchy was not surprised.

"Prob'ly pullin' out of the game while he's got a few chips left," he observed. "I'd 'a' quit long before this. Raisin' horses is a rich man's game in this country."

"Unless yuh brand 'em with a K77," grinned Hashknife.

"If we knew what you think you do, we'd grin, too," said Sleepy.

"I sure hate to be kept in the dark—" thus Frenchy dismally.

"Hunt around and get yourself a little light—that's what I done," grinned Hashknife.

"You sure as —— don't share yore light," grumbled Sleepy.

"Well," Hashknife grinned widely. "I ain't got enough for myself yet. Bimeby I'll try and show yuh illumination a-plenty."

"And there'll prob'ly be plenty of noise with it," said Sleepy. "I'm speakin' from experience."

V

FOR the next few days the horse thieves made no effort to shoot any one at the Bar 3. Hashknife knew the exact spot where the last shot had been fired, but a close search failed to disclose the empty cartridge shell.

"Gettin' wise to themselves," was Frenchy's verdict. Hashknife made no comment, except to agree that the bushwhackers were getting wiser all the time.

On account of the coming term of court Frenchy was obliged to go to Roper, but promised to be back as soon as possible. Sleepy chafed under the inaction. He wanted to do something, but Hashknife was content to play solitaire and enjoy the solid comfort of the ranch-house.

"We're safe in here," he told Sleepy. "If we go outside, mebbe somebody will shoot at us."

"Suits me," grumbled Sleepy. "Just as soon hang on the hot end of a bullet as to vegetate. Let's go to Greener and shoot a game of pool, or mingle the pasteboards."

Hashknife finally yielded and they went to Greener, where they found Army Bean and Jimmy Ashlock, playing a game of bottle-pool. They were perfectly willing to make it four-handed.

"After Saturday we'll be lookin' for jobs," stated Jimmy. "Tomorrow we start roundin' up what's left of the Five-Dot, and that's our swan song, as far as the Five-Dot is concerned."

"How is Hunter?" asked Sleepy.

"Able to get around. That thump on the head took all the scrap out of him, I reckon. Say, what became of Abe Allison?"

Hashknife played a shot which missed a side pocket by eight inches, scowled dismally and shook his head.

"I dunno where he is, Ashlock."

"Didn't he go out to the Bar 3 with yuh?"

"Nope."

"Uh-huh. Coulter said he thought Abe went away with you. Dang it, I didn't get any chance to visit with him. We've had to make so —— many trips to Roper lately, orderin' doctors and then goin' back to tell 'em to stay home."

"Five-Dot lost any more horses?"

"Lost that bunch the night Hunter got hit, and the night me and Army was in Roper they lost four more. One of 'em was the fancy-stepper that Hunter drove when

he came here. Hunter almost busted a tug when he heard about it. I reckon that was what caused him to want to sell."

"They smashed the lock on the stable door that night. Hunter said that buggy-horse was worth five hundred dollars." Thus Army Bean. "Them horse thieves are sure hoodlin' me and Jimmy out of a job. Pete Falls is still limpin' around and cussin'; swearin' he's goin' to get out of the range business. Silver Linin' swears he's goin' to quit cookin' and get somethin' permanent. Silver has been cookin' for thirty years."

"What's Coulter goin' to do?" asked Sleepy.

"I dunno. He's in Roper now; gone down there to see how that trial is goin' and to see if Hunter can be excused from appearin' until after Saturday."

Hashknife squinted at an unpromising combination shot and chalked his cue.

"How many men shoot 40-82 rifles around here?" he asked.

"How many? I dunno."

"Only one that I know about," said Army Bean indifferently. "Flannigan shoots one, I know. He trimmed all of us with it."

"I remember now," nodded Ashlock. "Gents, he shore can shoot. What do yuh want to know for?"

"Just curiosity," Hashknife missed his shot, and the subject was dropped, until they went to the bar, when the shooting match was mentioned again.

"Mike Larkin was a pretty good shot," observed Jimmy. "Him and Flannigan kinda locked horns, but Flannigan beat him."

"How many shots did they fire?" asked Hashknife.

"About twenty-five apiece. The danged Five-Dot never won a match. Army was high man for our ranch."

"Me and Coulter tied," grinned Jimmy, after their drink. "It didn't set good with Coulter. And then Pete Falls comes along and don't even hit the target. Pete's a pretty fair six-gun man, but he shore can't shoot a rifle. Pete's horse done a hoolihan with him the day after Hunter came, and Pete's been limpin' and cussin' about it ever since."

"Will Hunter have enough horses to make the sale worth while?" asked Hashknife.

"Oh, yeah, I reckon so. Mostly yearlin' and two-year-olds. Quite a lot of brood mares. But the pick of his stock has faded away. By golly, a year ago we shore had some fine horses. Kept us all busy breakin' 'em, but lately we ain't had much to do."

There was little to be learned in Greener, except that Hunter's sale would probably draw quite a number of horse buyers. Sleepy tried to find out what Hashknife had on his mind, but with his usual success.

"Well, I dunno," declared Sleepy. "As far as I can see yuh don't know any more about it than I do."

"Not a danged bit more," agreed Hashknife. "It's just like takin' the ingredients of a cake and givin' half of it to a baker and the other half to a blacksmith. They've both got the same stuff, but I'll bet the results won't be the same."

"Meanin' that you've got more brains than I have?" demanded Sleepy indignantly.

"Has a baker got more brains than a blacksmith?"

Sleepy knew that Hashknife was not ready to tell him; so he subsided. He had perfect faith in Hashknife's ability to unravel a range mystery, but this time it seemed to him that there was nothing to even base a suspicion upon. As far as Sleepy could see there was nothing, except some empty 40-82 cartridges for evidence, and Hashknife would not even consider arresting Egg Flannigan.

THE following day, Friday, the Walker family and Frosty Hedges came home. The defense attorney had been granted a postponement of one week, in order to complete his defense; and bail had been furnished for Dean and Frosty.

They were all anxious to know what Hashknife and Sleepy had found out, but Hashknife could tell them nothing. Ma Walker was downhearted and half sick over the prospect.

"We haven't any evidence to help us," she said wearily. "The prosecution hasn't much more, but you know how a jury feels in a case of that kind in this country. It just puts us at the mercy of twelve men, with nothing to help us, except—well, nothing."

"You cheer up, Ma," said Hashknife kindly. "Lookin' on the dark side of things never won anythin'. The boys ain't convicted yet. Why, Ma, they ain't even been tried. Yo're quittin' before the race starts."

"Oh, I know I am. But our lawyer says—"

"There yuh are! You must have a real good lawyer, Ma. He's a quitter, too. Me and Sleepy got into this by mistake, and we ain't got nothin' to win. They've tried to kill us a couple of times, and they've wrote us the most lovin' notes yuh ever read; but we ain't thought of quittin' yet."

"Well, I—I'm glad of that," Ma Walker smiled wearily. "But you see, you haven't a son being tried for a crime."

"Have you found out anythin' at all?" asked Dad.

"Yeah," Hashknife smiled softly. "I reckon I've found out quite a lot. There's a lot of things I don't know, but I'm the best guesser yuh ever seen. Say, do yuh still want to sell this ranch?"

"Why—uh—" Dad was astonished at the question. "After what you know about it, would you buy it?"

"Know about what?"

"Why the horse stealin' and all that."

"Pshaw, I'm goin' to stop that, Dad."

"You—you think you are?"

"I'm almost through thinkin'," grinned Hashknife. "What do yuh think I've been doin' since we came here?"

"Sounds to me like you've been dodgin' bullets mostly." Thus Frosty.

"That only made me think harder. I may not be able to get back any of the vanished broncs, but I'll betcha the Wild Horse range will be safe for an unprotected horse to be out after dark."

"I wish our lawyer knew what you know," said Ma.

"If he did, he'd talk and I'd prob'ly get killed," grinned Hashknife. "Anyway, I ain't got no evidence that he could use. I'm bettin' that old man Colt has Blackstone beat a mile in this particular case."

"Will yuh let me in on it?" asked Frosty. "I *sabe* that kind of a trial."

"Frosty, I can't let anybody in on it. I dunno who will be in on it, except myself. Somewhere in the Big Book there's a page for tomorrow and for the next day, and the next. Who knows what is written? Mebbe it says that Hashknife Hartley won't be in on it."

"Do you think that our lives are all mapped out for us when we are born?" asked Ma Walker.

"I sure do, Ma. I don't think we've got a thing to do with it. Why, it's even fixed as to what we do for a livin'. One time I worked three years to earn a share in a livery-stable, and the darned thing burned down when I was on my last month."

The laugh which followed put every one in a good humor, and Ma Walker sang as she prepared supper. Hashknife showed Dad where the bullet, which went through the dummy, had bored into the living-room wall, and Dad dug it out.

The roll of blanket had taken much of the velocity from the bullet, and it was recovered almost perfect in shape.

"It's a 45-70," declared Frosty. Dean settled the question by bringing out a 45-70 bullet-mold, and the bullet fitted it well enough to prove the caliber.

"They switched rifles on us that time," said Sleepy. "The other time they used a 40-82."

They had supper and talked until nine o'clock, when Hashknife declared his intentions of going to Greener.

"Me and Sleepy will put up there tonight," he explained. "I'm just plumb scared to ride from here in the mornin', and anyway I'm kinda expectin' to meet a man in Greener tonight."

"You know best," declared Dad Walker. "We'll come in and watch the sale tomorrow."

They saddled their horses in the dark and rode away. The Walker family had hired a team and a two-seated buggy to bring them from Greener, and Dad laughingly remarked that at last he had two horses in his stable that no horse thief would steal.

Hashknife and Sleepy put their horses up at the livery-stable and ran into Bean and Ashlock. The Five-Dot herd had been put in the big corral behind the livery-stable, and Hunter had ordered Bean and Ashlock to act as guards.

"We've got sixty head of animiles," said Ashlock. "Yuh can't call 'em all thoroughbreds, but most of 'em has got four legs."

"And we're settin' herd on 'em," added Army grinning. "It's a —— of a job, when there's some perfectly good poker games goin' on at the Greener."

IT SEEMED that Hunter's sale had been well advertised in a short time. Jack McLean, owner of the JMK outfit, was already in town, as was Lem Stout, who owned the TR. Both owners brought cowboys with

them, and these cowboys seemed bent on making it a holiday.

Frenchy O'Regan had come back from Roper, imbibed a few drinks, and greeted Hashknife and Sleepy like a long-lost brother. He was drinking with several cowboys, and insisted on introducing them to Hashknife and Sleepy.

" 'Shorty' Judd and 'Columbus' Cobb are from the JMK and the TR disrespectively. Larry Elkins is from the Box 8," explained Frenchy. "And we're all little friends together. What'll yuh all have?"

Hashknife and Sleepy shook hands with the three men. Judd was a cadaverous-looking person, wry-necked, weak-eyed. Cobb was short and broad-shouldered, with a stolid expression and a big nose. Larry Elkins was of medium height, slender, and of an olive complexion. His face was thin, bony, almost feminine in contour, and his deep-set eyes were as black as India-ink.

"We call this'n Columbus," explained Frenchy, " 'cause he's always findin' somethin'."

"Never did," objected Cobb. "I got lost one night up on Milk River—that's how it was. I was pretty sure that the ranch was due north; so I follered the North star and got home. I told the boys about it, and they didn't think I knowed one star from another.

"I sure as —— did; so the next night I showed 'em which star I follered, and they all agreed that I was a dinger. It was due east that night. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! If I'd 'a' knowed which was the North star I'd be up around the North Pole yet; prob'ly punchin' wal-russes."

Tom Ahrens, foreman of the Lazy H, located to the south, trooped in with two of his cowboys, and began renewing acquaintances. In a few minutes more Amos Kemp and a big, square-faced cowboy came in. The big cowboy shook hands enthusiastically with Frenchy and pounded Larry Elkins on the back.

"Long time I no see yuh, Larry!" he whooped. "How'r yuh, kid?"

"Fine'r 'n silk, Buck. How'r you?"

"Wolf-wild! By golly, it shore is good to be back. Hyah, Frenchy?"

Hashknife and Sleepy smiled at the handshaking, and Frenchy suddenly remembered them. He grasped the big cowboy by the arm and swung him around.

"Buck Keen, I want yuh to meet Hartley and Stevens. Boys, this here is Buck Keen. He used to punch horses for the Five-Dot."

They shook hands and Buck invited every one to drink. He was the largest man in the room, and a whisky-glass looked very tiny in his big hand. Hashknife could see that the boys intended making a night of it.

Making their way out during the uproar, Hashknife and Sleepy went to the little hotel, only to find that every bed was taken.

"Prob'ly won't use 'em," said the proprietor, who knew whereof he spoke. "But they've paid for 'em, gents. Sorry."

They drifted back to the livery-stable and found Abe Allison with Ashlock. Bean was sitting out on the corral gate, guarding the herd. Allison shook hands with them, but made no mention of his mission.

"Quite a crowd here tonight," observed Allison. "I need some sleep; so I'm goin' to crawl into the hay-loft pretty soon. All the hotel beds are taken."

"You want to sleep in the hay, Hashknife?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife shook his head.

"Not tonight. There's too darned much fox-tail in the hay they raise around here. I didn't come here to be tickled to death. Let's see if our poker luck is any good."

They went back to the Greener and found the hilarity increasing. A cowboy from the JMK outfit was trying to sing a sentimental song, while other voices accompanied him, badly off-key, and many without either words or music. An argument was in progress at the bar, and as Hashknife and Sleepy came in Frenchy yelled at Buck Keen—

"By golly, I can prove it by Hartley himself."

"Prove what?" grinned Hashknife.

"That you whipped Lynn Coulter and Egg Flannigan at the same time."

Hashknife laughed.

"You couldn't call it a whippin', Frenchy."

"I hope I never get whipped worse," declared Frenchy. "Some of these jug-heads from the north don't believe it; but there's plenty of witnesses."

Buck Keen squinted at Hashknife, his eyes traveling up and down Hashknife's slat-like frame. He grinned and shook his head.

"Nope—not hardly, Frenchy," he said. "Mebbe this Hartley had a punch that day, but he shore left it home tonight."

Hashknife smiled and nodded. He realized that Buck had imbibed just enough liquor to be quarrelsome, and Hashknife did not care to argue with a man as big as Buck.

"Yuh see," said Buck harshly. "He admits that he ain't got it."

"All right." Frenchy realized that the argument was leading to trouble; so he turned back to the bar.

Hashknife crossed the room and sat down in a poker-seat, taking the place of a cowboy who had tried to make a bob-tail flush beat four tens.

Hashknife could hear Buck still trying to continue the argument, while others advised him to shut up and drop the subject. Luck was with Hashknife from the first and his pile of chips grew rapidly, largely at the expense of the house.

PLAYERS dropped out and others took their place with great regularity, and Hashknife suddenly found himself looking across the table at Buck Keen, who had flung a pile of currency on the table and called loudly for blue chips.

"I plays 'em blue," declared Buck. "Nothin' but blue. Gimme some cards to bet m' blues on, dealer." He looked across at Hashknife and laughed harshly. "Well, if we ain't got the human pile-driver with us tonight. Kinda lucky too, eh? Gotta lot of chips. What's the ante worth? Make it easy on yourself, gents."

"Five-dollar jack-pots," said the dealer. "No limit."

Buck's brows lifted slightly, and Hashknife knew that Buck had miscalculated the size of the game.

Buck opened the first pot for five dollars, and Hashknife raised it twenty dollars. The dealer stayed, and Buck raised it twenty more.

"Make it a hundred," said Hashknife.

Buck licked his lips and squinted at the dealer, who passed. He had tasted Hashknife's luck and his palate was still sour. Buck called and asked for two cards. Hashknife indicated that he would stand-pat.

"Oh, ho!" laughed Buck, but without mirth. "Got enough, eh? Pass the bet to a pat-hand."

Hashknife promptly bet another hundred. Buck studied his hand for several moments, a half grin on his lips. He had drawn to three sixes and caught the fourth one. His only worry was that Hashknife would not raise again. He counted his money several times.

"Three hundred and thirty dollars in cash and fifty in chips. It'll take three hundred and eighty to see my cards, Hartley."

Hashknife reached in his pocket and took out a flat wallet, from which he extracted several bills of big denomination, and smoothed them out on the table.

"Call yore three hundred and eighty, Keen," he said easily, "and raise yuh another hundred."

Buck licked his lips and blinked painfully. He had no more money with him. His eyes swept the room, as if looking for some one who might loan him the money, but came back to the pot.

"Draw down yore hundred," he said harshly. "I'm all in the pot."

"I called yuh then," smiled Hashknife.

With a shaking hand Buck spread his four sixes.

"Dang the luck, I wish I'd a' had more money," he said.

"Too bad yuh didn't," Hashknife spread four jacks and a trey.

Buck stared at them for a moment and got to his feet.

"What kind of a —— way is that to play poker?" he roared. "Standin' pat on a set of fours! Well, for ——'s sake!"

"Sorry," said Hashknife softly. "But yuh see there was no use drawin'; I had all four of the jacks."

"You had all four—" Buck caught his breath at the ignorance of the man who had broken him. "Say, did you ever play poker before?"

Before Hashknife could reply a fusillade of shots rang out down the street. The saloon went silent for several moments. Two more shots sounded, spaced about three seconds apart, and in a moment more came the sound of running horses.

There was a general rush toward the door and the roar of excited voices. Hashknife calmly pocketed his winnings and went outside. Men were running down toward the livery-stable, and a loose horse ran past the saloon, almost colliding with the saddle-horses at the hitch-rack.

Hashknife found an excited crowd at the corral. Some one had hit Army Bean over the head, knocking him out; opened the corral gate and turned the horses loose.

Ashlock and Allison had heard the commotion, and had run out, only to be driven back by bullets.

Allison was bleeding from a bullet-furrow across his shoulder, but otherwise they were unhurt. The men carried Bean to the saloon, where he rapidly recovered, and between groans he told them that he had been sitting at a corner of the corral, smoking a cigaret, when the world fell down on his head.

VI

FRENCHY asked for volunteers to search for the horse thieves and those sober enough to ride immediately went after their horses. Hashknife and Sleepy remained behind, as they felt that the posse would do nothing but ride around in the dark and come back without finding anything.

"By golly, them horse thieves sure have nerve," declared Abe Allison, as Hashknife bound up his shoulder at the livery-stable.

"Jist think of comin' down here and takin' 'em away from town."

"I think they made a mistake this time," smiled Hashknife.

"I wonder if they didn't," said Abe.

Abe went back to bed in the hay-loft while Hashknife decided to go back and see what was going on in the saloon. Buck Keen had not ridden with the posse, and was at the bar, parading his own valor. The games were all going again, but Buck's roll was in Hashknife's pocket.

"I'm a good poker player," Buck told the bartender, when he caught sight of Hashknife. "I ain't no expert, but I know the game, yuh understand. I've played poker a lot, but I'll be ——ed if I ever played with a man who didn't have brains enough to draw to fours."

"It caught you asleep at the switch," grinned Hashknife, moving in beside Buck. "A one-card draw might 'a' made you think I had fours; so I stood pat and let yuh buck yore puny sixes agin' my jacks. You didn't have enough money to make it interestin'."

"I didn't, eh?" Buck laughed sarcastically and exhibited another roll of bills.

"Held out on me, eh?" Hashknife squinted narrowly at the roll. "Got cold feet and reneged on a hundred-dollar bet."

"Who got cold feet?" Buck surged away from the bar. "You never seen the day you could give me cold feet, —— yuh."

Hashknife laughed at him.

"How much money have yuh got?"

"I've got enough."

Hashknife turned to the gawping bartender.

"Give me yore dice-box."

Buck watched him curiously as he dumped out all the dice, replaced one in the box and drew out a roll of currency.

"What's the game?" queried Buck.

"Count yore roll," grinned Hashknife. "Get out yore money and lick yore lips, 'cause I'm goin' to roll yuh one dice, aces-high, for every cent you've got."

"Just one roll?" Buck's voice was weak.

"One roll."

Buck fumbled his money, cleared his throat harshly, but shoved the money back in his pocket and shook his head.

"No, yuh don't. There's a catch to it somewhere."

"The catch is in yore throat," laughed Hashknife, shoving the dice back to the bartender. "You've been tryin' all evenin' to start somethin' with me, Keen. Take my advice—sober up and keep yore mouth shut."

Hashknife crossed the room and grew interested in a roulette wheel, while Buck slouched against the bar. He turned to the bartender and demanded a drink.

"What's this feller's business?" he asked the bartender.

"Search me. I've heard all kinds of talk, Buck. Some say he's a detective, workin' on the horse stealin'; but I dunno."

"Thasso?" Buck drank his liquor and hitched up his belt. "I'm goin' to bed, by ——! S'-long."

"So-long, Buck."

The posse was coming back, empty-handed, rattling their spurs along the wooden sidewalks, as they headed for the saloon. Buck met them at the door and came back to the bar with them.

"We found some loose horses scattered around," said Frenchy. "I think they missed out this time. We'll start out early and see if we can't pick up most of the herd; it's too dark now."

Larry Elkins moved in beside Buck.

"Didja lose that roll, too?" he asked.

Buck shook his head quickly.

"No, do yuh want it back? That —— fool wanted to roll one dice, jist once, for every cent I've got. I flashed my roll on him and he swore I reneged in the poker game."

"And you took it, eh?"—sarcastically. "What is he—a professional gambler?"

"He's a detective, Larry. A Hawkshaw of the hills."

Elkins turned and studied Hashknife, who was laying small bets on the wheel.

"A detective, eh? Cattlemen's Association?"

"I dunno, Larry," Buck lowered his voice, "who in —— do yuh reckon stole them horses?"

"I've been wonderin', Buck. It looks —— funny to me. All of 'em Five-Dot animals. It's makin' me leery, I tell yuh."

"Aw, ——!" Buck spat angrily. "Let's have another drink."

"Just a minute. Didja hear about the stage holdup?"

"Yeah. Got about five thousand altogether. They've got Dean Walker and a feller named Hedges ——"

"You remember Frosty Hedges, don't-cha?"

"Aw, sure. I wonder if they done it, Larry?"

Larry laughed shortly and turned to the bar. Several of the men were discussing the horse stealing and one suggested that it might be well for some one to ride out and tell Hunter that his sale was ruined.

"He'll find it out soon enough," said Frenchy.

"I wonder why Coulter and Pete Falls ain't down tonight?" Thus Larry Elkins.

"Takin' a rest, I reckon," said Frenchy. "They've been hittin' the high spots, roundin' up Five-Dots lately."

BUCK choked over his liquor and flung the glass against the bar. It seemed as if his last drink made him mad. Hashknife turned from the wheel and came back past the bar, followed by Sleepy.

Larry Elkins seemed to realize that Buck was about to do something, and grasped Buck by the sleeve, but Buck jerked his arm away and hurled himself into Hashknife, without any warning, except that Hashknife had seen Larry's movement to stop Buck.

But that was enough for Hashknife, and Buck went staggering backward when the heel of Hashknife's open right hand caught him under the chin and threw him aside. It was not unlike the straight-arm used by football players to fend off an adversary, and was so unlooked for that Buck had no defense for it.

Frenchy immediately stepped in between Buck and Hashknife, crowding Buck against the bar.

"Now you show a little sense," advised Frenchy.

Buck swore wickedly and tried to shove Frenchy away, but the sheriff was no weakling and held his ground.

"Let him loose, Frenchy," said Hashknife. "I don't need anybody to hold 'em for me."

"All right," Frenchy laughed softly and stepped aside. Buck did not move.

"Choose yore weapons," grinned Hashknife. "You've got two hands and a gun. I ain't particular which yuh decide on."

The crowd waited for Buck to declare his choice, but it seemed that he could not make up his mind.

"Not a gut," declared Sleepy inelegantly. "Let's go to bed."

Buck did not move, as Hashknife turned his back and walked out of the place. None of the men spoke to Buck, who walked to the far side of the room and sat down, realizing that he had shown a yellow streak.

Hashknife and Sleepy headed for the livery-stable. It was the one place in town where they could snatch a few hours' sleep, even if the fox-tail grass did annoy them.

"Just why," propounded Sleepy, "did you have these little run-ins with Buck Keen, Hashknife?"

"I wanted to find out whether Buck had nerve or not."

"Well, that's fine!" snorted Sleepy. "What in —— difference would that make to you?"

"Might make a lot of difference, Sleepy."

"I s'pose so. You ain't aimin' to write a book on 'Brave Cowboys I Have Buffaloed,' are yuh?"

"Somethin' like that, Sleepy. I hope they get back enough horses for the sale. I won enough in that poker game to buy me a danged good horse."

Abe Allison was stretched out on the hay, and greeted them warmly. His shoulder was aching enough to keep him awake, but he did not complain.

"You fellers pound yore ears," he advised. "I'll be awake if anybody tries to steal the stable."

It was only a few short hours until morning, but the two cowboys made good use of

it. Allison slipped away after daylight, but did not disturb them, and it was not until the cowboys began bringing back the scattered Five-Dot horses that Hashknife and Sleepy awoke.

There were but few of the horses missing. It seemed that the shooting had scattered the herd badly, making it impossible for the thieves to handle them in the dark; and the fear of pursuit had caused the stampeders to make their escape, without a single animal to pay them for the chances they had taken.

The Greener saloon was open when Hashknife and Sleepy went to breakfast, but there were few of the cowboys in evidence.

"Nightingales last night—buzzards this mornin'," laughed Hashknife.

A man came from the hotel door, half dressed, carrying a pitcher, and went to the pump at the corner. The pump-handle protested loudly, as the man worked it wearily.

Creak, creak, creak, creak, cre-e-eak, went the handle, followed by the splash of water into the pitcher.

A window of the hotel squeaked upward and a touseled head leaned out.

"Hennery," pleaded the man in the window. "Hennery, if yuh love me, gimme the well when yuh git through with it, will yuh?"

"Come and git it," grunted the man at the handle. "My ——, I'm no chambermaid."

He picked up the pitcher and drank gustily.

"Aw-w-w, Hennery!" The man in the window leaned out so far that he almost lost his balance. "Bring me some water, will yuh?"

The man with the pitcher came from the pump and stood directly beneath the window, looking up.

"——, you've got a pitcher, Dan. C'mon down and git yore own."

"I can't, Hennery. Some darned saddle-slicker done stole m' pants."

"Aw-w-w right. Toss me yore pitcher, Dan. I've got to pack some up to Columbus."

Dan left the window, but appeared immediately with a pitcher, which he tossed down to Henry. Perhaps neither of them realized that the pitcher weighed several pounds, and that it would gain considerable velocity in being tossed from the second story to the sidewalk.

But it was evident that Henry realized it later, because he threw up the other pitcher to fend the tossed one away from him, with the result that both pitchers were smashed, practically in midair, and Henry fell backwards off the sidewalk, showered with crockery and water.

He landed flat on his back, whooping wildly, scrambled back to his feet and glared at the man in the window.

"You —— fool!" he wailed. "I said 'toss it'—not 'throw it!' What in —— do yuh think I am? I've got a good notion to come up there and climb yuh."

"Was yuh tryin' to catch my pitcher in yours?" demanded Dan indignantly. "Of all the —— imbeciles I ever seen. You didn't even try to catch it. You'll pay for it, by golly; I won't!"

The next window to Dan's slid up protestingly, and a bearded face was thrust out. For a moment the men glared at the arguing cowboys, and the next moment he flung a granite-ware wash-bowl down at Henry.

The bowl caught in the breeze, sailed like a blue-rock, and struck just behind Henry, who ran jerkily into the hotel. From behind the bearded one came a growled question.

"Aw, a couple of half-witted punchers doin' Romeo and Juliet," replied the bearded one, and slammed down the window.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy laughed and went into the restaurant. They sympathized with everyone concerned, and realized that there was little humor in it for Henry, Dan and the bearded one. There was no one else in the restaurant; possibly few in Greener who had any appetite for breakfast that morning.

Egg Flannigan rode in with Thirsty Thurston and they met Hashknife and Sleepy. Flannigan was anxious to find out what Hashknife knew about those 40-82 cartridges, but Hashknife smiled and declared that he had discovered nothing.

"I've been tryin' to find out a few things, but ain't had no luck," said Flannigan. "I don't believe there's another 40-82 rifle in this whole danged country."

"Neither do I," said Hashknife.

"Well, ——!" exploded Flannigan. "Look where that puts me."

"It does look kinda bad for yuh," admitted Hashknife. Flannigan adjusted his hat nervously..

"—— it, I ain't shot that gun for a month!" he protested.

"I'll betcha."

"And nobody else has had it, Hartley."

"They didn't need it."

"Aw-w-w-w, ——!" Flannigan jerked his hat down over his eyes and strode toward the Greener saloon. Hashknife grinned widely.

"Somebody is goin' to knock —— out of you some day," declared Sleepy. "You exasperate everybody, Hashknife."

"Been thataway all my life," said Hashknife seriously. "And if I ever had any —— in me, it's still there."

Dad Walker, Dean and Frosty drove in and left their team at the livery-stable. Bean and Ashlock left the corral and came up the street. Bean's head was bandaged and he was carrying his hat. They had recovered most of the scattered herd, and were in fairly good spirits.

As they came up to Hashknife and Sleepy, Hunter, Coulter and Pete Falls rode in, leaving their horses at the Greener hitch-rack.

"You go tell 'em the bad news, Jimmy," urged Bean. "Tell 'em we got most of the wrecks back in the corral."

The three men from the Five-Dot came across the street; so Jimmy waited for them to arrive. Pete was still limping.

Hunter growled over the news, but brightened when Jimmy told him that practically all the horses had been recovered. Hunter's head was bandaged, and he forced a smile at sight of Army Bean's swathed head.

"It's a good thing we're sellin' out," said Army. "Them —— head-hunters would plumb ruin everybody."

Frenchy O'Regan came from the hotel and joined them. He was red-eyed and not at all jovial.

"These cowboy reunions are too much for me," he declared. "Water tastes flat and I don't want liquor; all I want is solitude, by golly."

"Big night?" asked Coulter.

"Biggest yuh ever seen," Frenchy grinned at Hashknife. "I'll never forget the way Buck Keen looked, Hartley. He shore didn't want none of yore game; jist turned plumb yaller."

"Is Buck Keen in town?" asked Coulter.

"Everybody's in town. Bunches from the JMK, TR, Lazy H, Box 8; everybody came to town. It shore was a tall evenin'."

"Mebbe Buck Keen is lookin' for a job on the Five-Dot." Thus Pete Falls coldly.

"He didn't say," grinned Frenchy. "But he said most everythin' else. Larry Elkins came, too. I tell yuh, we had a crowd."

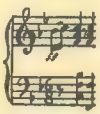
"Where's Buck?" asked Coulter.

"Sleepin', I reckon. They're piled up like cord-wood in them hotel rooms. My gosh, it was a madhouse. Nobody can find their own clothes this mornin'. I slept in mine, but I traded hats with some jigger. This 'n is so good I'll have to hide it."

"Is Larry Elkins buyin' for the Box 8?" asked Coulter.

"I dunno," Frenchy shook his head. "He was buyin' for everybody last night."

Coulter and Falls went to the corral with Hunter, where they inspected the horses, but Coulter left them and came back. The cowboys began to drift from the hotel to the saloon, seeking to put out the internal fires left by last night's conflagration.

Coulter stood near the hotel door, talking with the cowboys as they came out. There was a strained look about his eyes and he seemed visibly nervous. Bean came from the corral and told him that Hunter required his presence, but Coulter gave Bean a short answer.

HASHKNIFE lounged against the front of the general store, which was the next building to the hotel, and grinned thoughtfully. Sleepy smoked and watched Hashknife. Something seemed to tell him that trouble was imminent. Then Hashknife began singing softly:

> "When I die and go to rest
> Gimme the things that I loved best;
> Gimme a quart of liquor red;
> Plant it right down by my head.
> Gimme a gun and a saddle neat,
> And pray my range won't have much heat."

Not much of a song and not much of a voice, but never was a song sung with more solemnity. Sleepy's right hand dropped carelessly to the butt of his gun, shifting it to just the proper angle. He noticed that Hashknife's holster was swung forward just a trifle, but noticeable to no one except Sleepy.

"Lemme in on it, Hashknife," breathed Sleepy. "Don't hog the whole works."

"It ain't time, Sleepy," Hashknife did not turn his head. "The stage is bein' set. You'll know ahead of time."

From an open window of the hotel came the voice of a cowboy, singing mournfully.

"O-o-oh, I'll saddle my pony and feed him some ha-a-ay,
And I'll buy me a bottle to drink on the wa-a-a-ay."

From down on the sidewalk a cowboy took up the refrain.

"For I'm a rambler, a gambler, I'm a long way from home,
And them that don't like me can leave me alo-o-one."

Buck Keen was the cowboy who started the song. He came from the hotel, swaggering, hardly sober, and found himself face to face with Lynn Coulter.

"Hyah, feller!" he roared, grasping Coulter with both hands.

Hashknife and Sleepy were unable to hear what Coulter said. Buck took his hands away, cuffed his hat sideways on his head, and it seemed to Hashknife and Sleepy that he started an argument.

He started to expostulate over something Coulter said, but stopped. After a minute or two more of conversation he turned and went back into the hotel, while Coulter crossed the street to the Greener saloon.

Dad Walker, Dean and Frosty were coming up the street, talking to one of the northern horse buyers, and behind them came Abe Allison.

"Hunter is goin' to start his sale pretty quick," Dad told Hashknife. "He says he can't get out of here too quick to suit him."

"It won't make anybody sore," grinned Frosty, as they went in to the store. Allison stopped beside Hashknife.

"What do yuh know, Hartley?" he asked.

"Not much—yet, Abe. How's the shoulder?"

"Fine. Don't hurt much. Anythin' yuh want me to do?"

"You've done a lot, Abe; thank yuh. You better lay low now."

Allison grinned and went in the store, while Hashknife and Sleepy crossed to the Greener saloon. Quite a crowd had gathered already, and were talking over the sale. Frenchy drew Hashknife aside.

"I've been talkin' with all the horse men from north of here, and none of 'em have lost any stock."

"I could 'a' told yuh that, Frenchy."

"Well, how in —— would you know?" Frenchy exploded with indignation.

"Observation, Frenchy."

"Observation, ——! Say! If you know so danged much, why don't yuh tell me about it?"

"Don't yell," said Hashknife softly.

"I've got a right to yell, ain't I? I've kept my mouth shut about that 40-82 proposition long enough. Now you tell me what you know about it, or I'm goin' to slap the deadwood on Flannigan right now. By ——, I'm sheriff of this county!"

"Yuh hadn't ought to yell," Hashknife spoke softly, patiently. "You ain't mad at me, are yuh, Frenchy?"

"You make me mad as ——!" Frenchy's nose twitched nervously. "I never seen a feller like you, Hartley. I swore I'd back yore play, and I've done it—but not any longer. Tell me what yuh know, or I slip the handcuffs on Flannigan."

Hashknife shook his head sadly and picked at a thread on the lapel of Frenchy's vest.

"Don't do that!" Frenchy's teeth clicked with exasperation.

"Loose thread," said Hashknife. "I don't like loose threads."

Hashknife glanced around the room and noticed that several men were looking at him, attracted no doubt by Frenchy's explosive utterances. Coulter was leaning across the bar, carrying on a conversation with the bartender, but Hashknife knew that he was watching the room in the mirror of the back-bar.

SUDDENLY a revolver shot, muffled somewhat, but unmistakable, was heard. It was impossible to determine its location. For several moments the men in the saloon merely looked at each other. Then Frenchy walked quickly to the saloon door, followed by others.

Dad Walker and Frosty Hedges were running into the street from the store; running out to a man who sprawled on his face in the dusty street. Hashknife and Frenchy ran out to them and helped carry the man back to the sidewalk.

It was Abe Allison. A quick examination showed that he was past help. The bullet had gone in beneath his left shoulder-blade.

"Who shot him?" demanded Frenchy.

No one seemed to know.

"Wasn't anybody on the street, except this man?"

"I don't think so," said Dad. "We heard the shot."

"There wasn't anybody in sight," declared Frosty.

Hashknife knelt beside Allison, whose eyes were open now. He seemed to know what it was all about, and was trying to talk.

"Take yore time, pardner," said Hashknife softly.

"Not much time," whispered Allison. "It's—all—right. Glad—I had—chance—Hartley."

"Do yuh know who shot yuh?" Thus Frenchy anxiously.

Allison shook his head, gasping painfully—

"Hartley—will—"

Hashknife got slowly to his feet, gripping his hat in both hands. His face was pale, contorted a trifle. Jimmy Ashlock shoved his way to the center and looked at his cousin.

"Hartley will—" said Hashknife softly. "Yo're right he will, pardner."

It was the first time that Sleepy had ever seen Hashknife exhibit such deep emotion, and the crowd seemed to realize that something big was about to happen. They had spread from the compact mass. From where he stood on the sidewalk Hashknife could see Hunter on the outskirts of the crowd.

Frenchy stood on the sidewalk near Hashknife, watching him, as he scanned the crowd, taking a mental census. They were all there; the Five-Dot, JMK, TR, Box 8, Bar 3, and all the rest.

"Who shot him, I'd like to know?" asked Ashlock.

"Mebbe you'll find out, Jimmy," said Hashknife, scanning the crowd. He took a deep breath, and his face hardened as he began:

"Abe Allison died because he helped me. He was shot like a dog. They never gave him a chance. He was shot the same as Mike Larkin was; the same as they tried to kill me. Allison packed a message for me—a faked message—and they shot him from a window of the hotel; killed him because they thought Abe Allison knew what I knew.

"He didn't know," Hashknife laughed shortly. "He lost his life in tryin' to repay me for a favor I done him. You all know about the horse stealin' of the Wild Horse range. It was clever work. The K77 lost no horses—not one. That was the key to the whole thing."

Hashknife stopped. All eyes were turned on Flannigan, whose lips had gone white. Men stepped from behind him, feeling that he was dangerous.

"What do you mean?" he gritted.

"Hold steady, my friend," said Hashknife. "There's no deadwood driftin' toward you."

Flannigan relaxed slowly, wonderingly. It was beyond him.

"The man who killed Mike Larkin left his mark on the ground," continued Hashknife. "That mark was eight 40-82 shells. Flannigan owns the only 40-82 in this range. But," Hashknife smiled with his lips, "he only fired six times. I counted 'em.

"He didn't have a double-barreled rifle; so it's a cinch he couldn't shoot twice at the same time. It kinda looked like Mr. Flannigan had been careless. In fact, it looked so danged careless that I collected the shells. There wasn't even the smell of powder left in 'em; so I knew they hadn't been fired for a month.

"The man who tried to kill me, and shot a dummy by mistake, used a 45-70. He was the same man who saved his shells and planted the 40-82's in their place."

"Could yuh prove this?" asked Dad Walker.

"Sure. That man was movin' all the time he was shootin'. Them 40-82's were all close together. A Winchester rifle ain't noways trained to put all its empty shells in the same spot; not when the shooter is firin' from a different spot every time."

"What has that got to do with the horse stealing?" Thus Hunter, who had moved forward, anxious to hear everything.

"The men who done that shootin' were the ones who stole the horses. Do you know why they never took the K77? No?" Hashknife scanned the crowd.

Sleepy shifted his feet nervously. He was still at sea.

"I'll tell yuh why," Hashknife leaned forward, his right elbow crooked, his right thumb rubbing the top of his holster.

"It was because yuh can't change a K77 on the left hip to a Box 8 on the right shoulder! With the Bar 3 and the Five-Dot—yuh can!"

"What do you mean, Hartley?" It was Hunter's voice, but Hashknife did not look

toward him; he was watching Coulter, Pete Falls, Buck Keen and Larry Elkins.

"I mean—yore own men stole from yuh. They relayed 'em to Buck Keen, who relayed 'em to Larry Elkins, owner of the Box 8! Coulter and Falls—not the others!"

AS HASHKNIFE denounced the four men, almost before the words were out of his mouth, Pete Falls screamed a curse and whipped out his gun. But Hashknife's draw was a shade ahead of Pete's and his bullet, fired from the hip, knocked Pete sidewise and sent him to his knees.

Buck Keen was running; running like a frightened coyote toward the hitch-rack. Elkins was game. He emptied his six-shooter, as he went down on his face, shocked by bullets from Frenchy and Sleepy; cursing, splattering his bullets into the ground near the feet of the innocent bystanders.

Coulter had shielded himself behind the frightened spectators, but now he whirled and ran toward the hitch-rack; running a zig-zag course, his six-shooter swinging in his hand. It was his one hope of a getaway.

Buck had managed to untie a horse and was reaching for a stirrup when Coulter arrived. It was the survival of the fittest. Buck seemed to realize that Coulter was going to take that horse. Men were running toward them; their time was short.

Their two guns thudded almost as one. Buck staggered backwards, one hand clinging to the reins, and fell beneath the hitch-rack, while Coulter, swung sidewise, recovered and grasped the fender of the saddle, fighting to keep his balance; but was sinking to his knees when the men reached him.

The horse reared back, whistling its fright, trying to yank the reins from Buck's death grip. Coulter was dead; his hands still clutching for a grip on that saddle. Frenchy was incoherent, as was nearly every one else.

Hashknife was still on the sidewalk, looking down at the body of Abe Allison, erstwhile crook, who had lost his life to repay a debt. Larry Elkins was still alive, game to the last. They carried him to the Greener saloon and administered whisky.

Hashknife came in and the men gave him room to move in close to the dying man. Elkins grinned gamely, as he said:

"Coulter framed this scheme. I don't know how you found out how it was worked. It took a lot of schemin' to keep Bean and Ashlock out of it. Pete never hurt his leg. It was Pete who shot the sheriff. Coulter promised to split holdup money with us."

"And they got them 40-82 shells at that last shootin' match, didn't they?" asked Hashknife.

"Prob'ly. Coulter's war-sack—stuff—from—holdup. Him—and—Pete. Say!" Elkins tried to lift his head. "Don't I get credit for turnin' state's—evidence? I ought—to—get—somethin'."

"I hope yuh do, Elkins," said Hashknife slowly. "The law won't pass on yore case."

Hashknife walked outside and most of the crowd followed him. Dad Walker gripped his hand, wordless in his gratitude. Frenchy was talking loudly to Dean and Frosty, telling them that the case against them was busted; and Flannigan was pawing at Hashknife, trying to force him to listen a moment.

"You had me scared, I tell yuh!" roared Flannigan. "I'm goin' to sink that —— 40-82 in the creek. You long-geared son-of-a-gun, I love yuh like a brother! Whoee-e-e!"

Hunter shoved Flannigan aside, but Flannigan did not mind.

"How did you find out these things?" asked Hunter. "I don't understand how you discovered all this, Hartley."

"Thinkin' about it," smiled Hashknife. "I found a brand register of Montana, yuh see. The K77 was the key. There was a good reason why they didn't want the K77 horses. I hunted for a brand that yuh could build the Bar 3 and the Five-Dot into, and I found the Box 8.

"The Five-Dot had to be smeared a little, but by workin' the four outside dots for the corners of the Box, and using the one center dot for the center of the 8—it wasn't hard to make. On the Bar 3, all they had to do was to complete the other three sides of the Box and make the 3 into an 8.

"I found out that you fired Elkins and Keen; *sabe?* I found out that Elkins was with the Box 8, and that Keen was between here and the border, livin' alone. It was a relay system. I sent Allison with a note to each of 'em, takin' a chance that they didn't know Coulter's handwritin'."

"It was a cinch," declared Frenchy. "Pete could drive the horses to Buck, and be back by mornin'. Buck drives to the

Box 8, where they change the brands and let Larry do the sellin'. By golly, I dunno why I never thought of that."

"There won't be any sale, will there?" asked Lem Stout.

"No," replied Hunter thoughtfully. "I'm through. Perhaps it was my fault that this occurred. If I had kept Elkins and Keen, all might have been well. Raising horses was a hobby with me; but I'm cured. Through me, Dad Walker has been cleaned out; suffered from a charge against his son, which I swore out in my anger.

"I thought I was a big man — bigger than any of you. I'm not. As I heard Jimmy Ashlock say about some one, 'He was so low that he could put on a stove-pipe hat and crawl under a snake.' That is the way I feel about myself over the whole thing, gentlemen. Right now I am going to give Dad Walker a bill-of-sale for every head of horses I own. It will partly repay him. I wish it was more."

Dad Walker protested, but Hunter was firm. He wrote the bill-of-sale, had Frenchy witness it and presented it to Dad Walker.

THEY talked together for several minutes and Hunter came to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Walker was telling me that you two came here to buy a ranch."

Hashknife and Sleepy looked at each other closely.

"The Five-Dot is for sale—cheap," continued Hunter.

"Well," Hashknife cleared his throat, "we did kinda think we might buy somethin'," admitted Hashknife. "We kinda had an idea of settlin' down and raisin' a few—uh—"

"Bees," prompted Sleepy seriously.

"Bees," said Hashknife.

"Bees?"

"Yeah—bees," Hashknife sighed deeply. "But after lookin' over the country, we don't reckon we will. It's too quiet."

"Thank yuh just the same," said Sleepy.

They left him there, staring after them, wondering why they wanted to raise bees. The doctor was busy over the casualties, while the men crowded around him, and it gave Hashknife and Sleepy an opportunity to reach the livery-stable undetected.

Swiftly they saddled their horses, led them out the rear door, and circled the town, heading for Roper. Their work was over and they were going away. If Greener wanted to sing their praise, they did not want to hear it.

"Where are we headin' for, Hashknife?" asked Sleepy.

"I dunno," Hashknife squinted straight ahead from under the brim of his sombrero. "There must be a place for us somewhere. Golly, I'd like to settle down."

"And raise bees?"

"Yeah, I'd kinda like to," wistfully. "If we can find the right place."

"Where it ain't too quiet?"

Hashknife grinned and they nodded together.

His Service

by

Warren P Staniford

INTONING a simple chantey of the sea-coast folk, Omume—O-mu-may—slid back the frail *shodzi* panel and brought the garden right into the house, so to speak. Her gaze trailed off across the spreading tops of the dwarfed pines in the temple yard, and over the hillside terraces to the crowding masts and dragon figure-heads of the harbor fishing fleet. Her eyes came to a startled focus on a big gray ship nosing in through the narrows with bilge-water pouring steadily from her iron sides.

The deck rails were lined with men in olive drab, and from stern floated a flag—just such a flag as she had seen in the old leather trunk with the words "McConnell, First Cabin" on it. Strange clothes and the pictures of white men and women were treasured in the trunk—"never mind stuff" McConnell would call it, with gentle impatience of her jealous interest in things which connected him with his own people. The chantey died on her lips. She clutched her kimono at her throat, and hooking her stocking'd right foot under the left calf, stood watching the great gray ghost of the sea progress deliberately and self-sure to a Japanese oil tanker that had arrived yesterday.

Then Omume caught steps approaching from the bathroom—not the shuffling, pattery footfalls of her own people, but firmly planted treads. In a sudden panic she closed the panel across the harbor scene, blotting from sight the ship, the flag, and all. But before the dying quiver of the bamboo frame ceased, before she could mask the fear in her face, his voice sounded right in the room.

"And how are you this morning?"

The shadow of a fear crossed the brown pools of her eyes, at the tonelessness of the salutation. Once or twice a month he would greet her in that distancing way, his eyes dull with brooding patience. Once—that time he got a letter from "my people"—the spell had lasted a week, threatening complete disaster to her little-big world. She saw all the dreaded signs of the spell this morning, even a starched shirt and collar, and a polka dotted tie, so anomalous to the cheap print kimono that was secured to his slight body by a cord at the waist. These were signs which outlawed her right to trip to him, push her fingers through his fine hair, and caress his cheeks.

She dared only make her pretty curtsey—a dainty down-sinking of the body and forward inclination of her dark head, and "Ohyo!" Omume straightened again and stood with her back to the panel, with so obvious and naïve an attempt at guarding a secret that he was moved to investigate. Lifting her by the arms he set her aside, and opened the panel.

McConnell's eyes riveted instantly to the transport, the olive-drab figures, the flag. He caught his jaws with a smothering palm and sank to his knees, native fashion, watching the gray ship swing alongside the tanker and take on oil-pipe lines. His soul breathed in the gentle waves of the Stars and Stripes. Soldiers! They would

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be going to Siberia, a part of the Allied Expedition. His country's fighting men flung far over seas to fight for—oh, his country would be fighting for Right. Aye, the wireless had flashed over oceans and brought transport and tanker to rendezvous in this out-of-the-way Japanese port. Providence sometimes does things like that.

A timid touch at his elbow. Omume was there, tendering him a bundle of strapped school books in a wistful hope to bring him back to *their* world. He jumped to his feet, waving the books away and flashing a sudden resentful review of the flimsy walls, art prints and embroidered Samurai swordsman. The single big arm chair served merely to accentuate the expatriate quality of the rest. Snatching the books he flung them into a corner, with a scornful laugh at the notion of teaching squatting, moist-mouthed, aggressively healthy brown children on this day of days.

Boats were swung out from the transport's davits and men scrambled into them. Sampans swarmed around the landing stage, eager to grab their share of the shore-leave traffic. McConnell followed the scooting small boats over the water to the wharf, watched the boisterous debarkation, and then the uniformed men who began to dot the town in all directions. Poignant longing to mingle with them was mastered by shame—shame of his cough in the midst of so much rollicking brawn.

Strong voices pulsated over the solemn temple gardens in a babel of sound into which he strained to hear words, phrases, sayings—to hear his homeland tongue without alien accent. The longing to go down and serve fought the timidness born of his exile. He reveled in the quick figures, the independent swing, the rough play. Fighting men, released from weeks of confinement—full of the devil. One came up the street past the house rolling in a swaying rickshaw—a monarch at the cost of a few yen—jibed at by his pedestrian comrades, eyed curiously by slant-eyed Japanese.

McConnell shrunk back from the panel to avoid being seen, but in a quick reversion of feeling thrust out his head, waved his hand, and wanted to yell—greeting, advice, question—anything—but to his dismay found his exile years were an unbridgable ellipsis in the speech of fellowship. He swung to Omume.

"My clothes! My trouser clothes!"

BY HERITAGE and training obedient to the man, though it kills the heart, Omume dug up from the leather trunk a creased suit of banker's gray, cut to an ancient pattern. Her peach-bloom paled a little as she aided his almost hysterical haste to get into the clothes. When he ran to the street, struggling into the coat, he caught an impression of terror-fixed eyes. A thought to run back and pat away the fear was killed in its inception by an American voice, chesty with the assurance of a proud race, and high pitched in a delusion that a "foreigner" must be shouted at—

"How much—*Ikura*—huh?"

"*Ju ni yen*—ver' nize," sang in flattering persuasion a voice which McConnell recognized as that of an old gentleman who presided over a stall of toys on the sidewalk.

"The blamed robber! He says twelve yen!"

Here was McConnell's call to serve. He wasn't going to see his countrymen bilked. In no time he was at the stall, shaking a gaunt fist in the smirking face of the toy dealer who was dangling a bone-ivory fan.

"Give him fifty cents gold and take it," McConnell bade a camp-browned young husky.

That was only a beginning. The narrow streets were everywhere blocked by groups of doughboys dickering in wild pantomime. McConnell embarked on a crusade of helpfulness. Over at the temple gateway he rescued a drawling Kentuckian from the brazen piracy of a rickshaw coolie who demanded "two-time" pay. He penetrated the bannered doors of the theaters, quieted brawlers in the teahouses, righted a misunderstanding between a crowd of men and their guide at the foot of the hundred steps to Shinto Hill.

McConnell's following grew. He became the talk of the shore-leave soldiers. "He's American." "White all the way through." "Funny little gink that talks the lingo to a finish." By noon he was "Old-Timer," "Buddy," "one of us." He rescued many a group from the reprobate money-changers, and settled an incipient riot in a movie house where Charlie Chaplin on the screen aroused a reckless homesickness that sought relief in destruction. But not always did he cast his verdict on the side of his own color. There were those who would bully

a bargain—"How muchee? Like —— I will!"—then a grab and a run, and a hue and a cry just for the fun of it, or to let the brown men know they couldn't come it over the U.S.A., or because *saki* and the freedom from weeks of confinement on shipboard were getting together explosively.

A new spirit was coursing through McConnell, self-pride such as he had not known in—how many years was it? He swung triumphantly down the streets, hastening from one episode to another. The solid earth was under his feet and he trod it with his own people. All the same, the scores of little-big services he had rendered failed to measure up to the spirit of quixoticism, or to appease his yearning to do something worth while. But there was promise.

The draft had not been finicky in its selection of men; there were several clashes with the Japanese police, in which McConnell had to swallow his pride and side with the Asiatics.

"Play the game boys, you're wearing the uniform. Don't forget you're wearing the uniform." Found he could say "boys" as easily as that. He was himself intoxicated; had no idea of the passing hours, or the miles of streets he traversed with his noisy flocks. Up and down they roved through the terraced town, under flapping bannerets that flapped spasmodically at their bamboos in gusts of wind which he recognized as heralds of a typhoon. Though he felt he should warn his protegees that they ought to be getting aboard, he couldn't bring himself to the pitch of courage.

The sun was slanting from the west over the Inland Sea. Rounding the corner of the municipal compound, McConnell came abruptly on a gyrating streak of olive drab, formed in circular defense against half a dozen stocky Japanese, others of whom the unfamiliar warfare had reduced to haunched postures of baffled watchfulness.

McConnell was instantly alive to the danger. The yells and slogans that burst from his little crew of trouble-seekers promised a gang fight. He visioned the Japanese police turning out at the double, the whole town in riot, the anti-Japanese California newspapers exaggerating the episode, and Washington and Tokio in sharp staccato communication.

"Oh b-o-y ! Let's go!" "Don't hurt 'em, *please* don't hurt 'em." "Take this one for luck." "Zowie!"

McConnell turned on them, arms stretched wide.

"Stop! Leave it to me. Be quiet I tell you! Leave it to me; it's only a misunderstanding."

"Wowie, listen to Old-Timer!" howled one of the men playfully, the while he flapped his lanky arms and slapped his hands together, making mesmeric and frightful faces at the crouched little policeman he had singled out for destruction.

But the pacifists gained control.

"Listen to him," they yelled, and "He talks up like the old boy himself—like Major Pomeroy."

IT WASN'T the first time that mad day that McConnell had heard Major Pomeroy passed around that way with the impelled respect of school boys for a Spartan master. It had come to sound in his ears like a heroic name in a fable. Blood tingled in his cheeks at the coupling of his name with the major's. It invested him with a kind of authority.

"Leave it to Old-Timer. Leave him find out what the rumpus is all about."

McConnell stepped into the group of Japanese, who recognized him and ceased their attack. In short order he learned that one of the soldiers had leaned over the dashboard, and in sheer good and lordly feeling hit his rickshaw coolie over the head with a *saki* bottle. Confronted by McConnell, he sheepishly confessed.

"I didn't aim to hurt him. Tell the little —— I'll pay up; I'll pay the damages."

It looked as if McConnell was to add another peace-making to the day's record and disappoint the sportive appetite of his compatriots, but up came trouble on the run—a score or more of sturdy, short fellows in baggy police uniforms and oversize helmets. The sight of this riot squad was more than shore-leave flesh and blood could stand.

"Let's go!"

Wellington's "Up Guards and at 'em!" had none of the trenchancy of that "Let's go!"

The rush swept aside Old-Timer, pleading—cursing with new-found fluency, for law and order. He might as well have talked against Niagara. The police used their billies, yet the Americans with their skill at in-fighting were holding their own until they began to go down under the sheer

mass of native population which increased momentarily. To remain inactive and listen to the murderous crack of the police sticks was asking too much of McConnell. He jumped in and commenced hitting at the Japanese—blind, impotent blows which they ignored. Presently two of them with one mind picked up the schoolmaster, carried him above the sea of heads and set him down outside the scrimmage.

Tearing mad, he was about to fling himself back into the melee when he heard booted feet in an approaching quick tattoo on the cobblestones. A corporal and four privates of the provost guard came up. Finding the odds hopeless, the corporal held up his charge long enough to shout a request—or order to McConnell—

"Get Major Pomeroy down at the breakwater."

McConnell shot down the hill, breakneck. Half way down he all but knocked over a woman with a paper package, at which a street dog sniffed hungrily. As he rushed on, not stopping to apologize, the woman, the package and the dog made a staying impression on his excited mind. But not until he nearly reached his journey's end did it suddenly strike him that the clog-sandaled little woman had been Omume.

Emerging from the shelter of the overhung street to the open wharf, the stiff blow of wind caught McConnell full in the face, ballooning his loose-hung suit. An inky black sky was piling over the harbor from the sea. The water was whipped into leaping white horses, and through the narrows the sea drove in mounting black walls with spumed tops. Natives worked frantically making fast to kedge anchors, while others sculled sampans ashore and hauled them high and dry. The transport had cast free from the tanker's oil lines and was heading lamely for the open sea where there was room to outmanoeuver the typhoon. After her nosed the tanker, fleeing from the risk of dragging moorings and piling up on the beach.

Bending to the wind McConnell worked down the dock toward a powerfully-built officer with major's gold leaves at his shoulders. With a dapper staff captain he was directing men at work making fast the transport's small boats. Intuitively McConnell recognized the masterful Pomeroy, and when the major turned at his approach all doubt of the identification vanished. Deep set eyes, dominating and wide apart, surmounted by bristling brows—a short, forceful face that fitted the prodigious chest and shoulders and the short frame. Acclimated as McConnell was to toyland paper houses and elfin gardens, the major seemed the personification of homeland's solid granite.

It seemed almost impertinent to worry this big man with the tale of the street brawl, so exciting a moment ago. He could not tell whether the major's quiet reception masked indifference or contempt. Disillusionment—a belittlement of the glorious sense of service attacked McConnell, and it seemed there was nothing for him to do now but crawl away, to go back to *shodzi* paper walls and the fairyland that had lost its lure. He was wretchedly conscious of his meager figure. But Pomeroy saw an opportunity to get some practical information.

"How long do these typhoons usually last?" he asked.

"Anyways from a couple of hours to twenty-four—Major," answered McConnell, catching to himself a tentative fellowship in the use of the title. "The town will probably be dark."

Pomeroy whistled in his teeth.

"Phew! Twenty-four hours, and five hundred wild men ashore. We've got to round them up, Mr.—"

"McConnell," prompted the exile, jerking his spine straight at the use of the "we."

"You know of any place where we can corral them Mr. McConnell?"

McConnell flung a forefinger toward a sheet-iron shed that loomed at the end of the wharf in a darkness which was descending from the black skies like a substance.

"Saki Hall—run by a half caste Mexican. But there's liquor there," he threw out in wind-snatched breaths.

Pomeroy quickly showed himself the reverse of passive.

"Adams," he said to the captain, "start the provost guard out in details to comb the town; orders are for everybody to report here at the wharf. We've got to get the whole outfit off the streets and under shelter before —— breaks loose. Tie up any man-jack that gives trouble." He detached a sergeant and six men to the fracas which McConnell had reported. "If the men won't listen, side with the police. Any

arrests the Japanese make must be O K'd until I can attend to them." He turned to McConnell. "We'll go now and see your Mexican."

THEY turned up the exposed wharf, the wild waters making angry leaps at them. It suddenly rained; a torrential, hissing, wind-driven downpour. Pomeroy linked McConnell's arm, probably to help him breast the storm, but McConnell glowed with the warmth of camaraderie. He was thankful for this extension of his crusade.

"This Mexican?" asked the major. "Can we give him short shrift, without getting into a mess with the local police graft?"

Proud was McConnell to answer that his word stood for something with the prefect of police. Pomeroy gave him a quick quizzing.

"In business yourself, Mr. McConnell? Factor?—Art goods buyer—eh?"

"No," McConnell's cheeks flushed and then went pale again as if it were a confession, "Teaching." Fortunately they had reached the Saki Hall. Pomeroy took occasion for a quick review of the flat-chested, chalk-faced man in the shiny suit as they stepped into the light of a single oil lamp that guttered dingily over an array of bottled trouble behind a bar at the far end of the barn-like room.

"I'll fix it all right with the prefect," McConnell interposed eagerly to ward off the major's scrutiny. "Do what is best. I'll take the responsibility, Major. ——! It's all I *can* do." Then in a gulp, a cry, "Use me any way you can, Major Pomeroy."

"Right now," Pomeroy responded, "because we're going to have that liquor out of sight before the men get here."

Men's work it was, hustling the bottles to a rear room and under lock and key, over the cursing protests of as villainous looking a proprietor as ever appeared in a tale of pirates, and who invoked the law but showed an inclination to bank mostly on a sawed-off shotgun. Pomeroy knocked it from his hands and tossed him twenty dollars gold for the hire of his dive.

By this time the first of the men straggled in, drenched, noisy, herded by the provost. Every now and then Pomeroy spotted a hip bottle, and at his nod a corporal of the guard made a grab, a curse, and broke the bottle on his heel. McConnell went among the groups, quieting incipient brawls, talking sense into them—or into some of them because here and there *saki*-madness bade fair to color the whole assembly with riotous malice. The spirit of adventure and service was on him. And he had the authority of the fabulous Pomeroy behind him—the great Pomeroy, who commanded the men to sit on the floor and on the floor they sat, every man under his detecting eye.

Suddenly there was a smash and darkness. Some one—the vengeful Mexican perhaps—had aimed a bottle at the one lamp. The darkness immediately emboldened the fractious.

"Give me a knife and I'll start something!" boasted a voice.

"McConnell!" the major's voice pinged through the darkness. "Here!" McConnell reported, ten tame, cloistered years of teaching dropping from him like a cast-off cloak. "Get me a light—quick!"

Pomeroy needn't have added the "quick;" McConnell had already estimated the position of the door and was on the run. He dashed out on the dock and groped for a lamp post, for the darkness was premature. The lamp-lighters had not yet got around. He bumped into a post, climbed it, and removed a tin oil-lamp and hurried back to the hall. A sergeant had matches. In the sequent light many of the men were seen on their feet, caught in the act of stealing to the door or windows. The feeble flare played up the jowled, keen faces. Pomeroy stepped to the center of the floor, the men reluctantly falling back before him. Holding their eyes with steeled glare he catapulted—

"'Tention!"

The curt rasp of it was a challenge, focusing the shifty eyes that had been casting calculating glances at the doors and windows. Still there were influences acting contrary to the major's complete control. The beat of the rain on the sheet-iron roof and the rattling of loose roof-plates in the wind created in the men a sense of duress. They had roved free all day—were not conscious of any great wrong-doing—were tired and resentful. The exciting question with McConnell was— Would the major hold them? He followed the hundred and one insignificances and importances of the silent struggle with almost painful excitement—all on edge to see Pomeroy win,

without knowing why he wanted so earnestly that the major should win. Had he been less excited—had he been able to analyze the hero-worship stuff that was tingling his blood, he would have discovered he was under the hypnotic fascination of power and strength, as much so as the street urchins who used to tag Bob Fitzimmons around San Francisco. To see that one man stand there and hold nigh five hundred men by sheer will power—stand there with hard face and a purposeful sneer on his lips, and thus deliberately challenge the mutinous—force the showdown,—all this was brutal, quivering drama, and McConnell's blood raced.

"Sit!"

It cut like an insult. It *was* an insult—a calculated, deliberate insult. For a second the result hung on a hair balance, when suddenly Pomeroy picked on a ringleader and shot at him:

"Sit! Rise! Sit—rise! Sit! Rise!" He kept the man singled out, bobbing up and down, under complete control of the hurtled commands. Made a regular fool of him.

"ONE of you asked for a knife. Said he'd start something. Well, I'm waiting. Where is that man?"

Ghastly, brutal, that subjection of the stalwarts by one voice, one soul. Brutal, yes, but magnificent too. The veins in McConnell's white temples were bursting with blood. It was as if that powerful physique, that dominating personality and cool courage symbolized all that McConnell would have gloried in in himself, had the gods favored him in brawn and muscle.

It couldn't go on forever. Something had to break. Feet began to make restive shufflings.

"Rest!" the major granted, tempered steel in his voice.

Eyes dropped before the cold, insolent smile on the major's lips—eyes that were furtive under veiled lids. Of a sudden the break came. A youth flung up his hat with a hysterical yell—

"Three for Major Pomeroy!"

Sheer hysteria no doubt, but it swung the balance, though at first going the cheers were undertoned by a certain ironic note. This was swept away soon however, by what might be called the Pomeroy sentiment. Not that the men cared so much which way it went, only it made one feel good to cheer, and get away with it. They drowned the beat of the rain and the rattling of the sheet iron on the roof. Cheered and cheered; and then broke into:

"You're in the army now!
You're not behind the plow—"

They sang it through to its ribald finish, and over again, till a voice flung in a new diversion.

"Three cheers for Old-Timer!"

They cheered the "funny little gink" who swayed on his thin legs beside their major, his presence, his concern in their affairs now familiar. They were in a mood to cheer anything and everything—the transport chow, Japan, the typhoon, William Jennings Bryan—only McConnell didn't know that. He went red with joy, trembled with happiness.

But how long would the mood hold? The wail of the storm began to be heard again. The wind threatened to bring down the place over their heads. The danger was real, but Pomeroy was on the job. He enlisted McConnell's knowledge and advice on the prospects of the town in the way of amusement, food, sleeping quarters. This was a long consultation, which created in McConnell a delirious delusion of permanence of his service. He hurried off up the town to a movie theater; forced a bargain on the spectacled proprietor, renting the place and what films there were on hand for fifty dollars for the night. Fifty dollars to come out of his own slim salary, if Pomeroy didn't take up a collection. He doubled back through the rain to the Saki Hall and marched beside the major at the head of the men, up the mucky streets between sleeping shops. Watchmen ceased their stick-tapping on the pavements and turned the lights of their lanterns on a procession of wide-brimmed hats and shoulders hunched against the slashing rain.

The men flopped to the matting of the seatless theater and were soon yawning at a New England elopment filmed in Hollywood. McConnell, hurrying off to scare up chow, saw a bright patch of stars over the sea—over the voids out of which had come the typhoon. He saw in that bit of clear sky the harbinger of the end of his saturnalia of service; knew right well that the transport was already creeping back to harbor on the wild tails of the storm. Yet

in the back of his head lived a kind of hope, which probably had no more foundation than a strange impression of permanent association with the transport and soldiers—a feeling that they were part and parcel of his life. He prospected every food source; bargained for sun-dried fish, doubtful eggs, bread, coffee, and apples sterilized in boiling water; pledged word, honor, and half a year's salary—his book fund and the little things he liked to buy Omume; routed out coolies to porter the loot to the theater, and headed them with a jealous eye for thefts, and reached the theater just as the dawn's forbidding light drove the chanting lepers slinking from their nocturnal freedom of the streets.

Setting up a cafeteria in the street, McConnell yelled to the frowsy crowd within—

"Come and get it!"

God knows where he got that, but no mess-sergeant in the national army ever made a bigger hit with the chow call. They tumbled out into the morning world with frolic and clownish play, and overwhelmed Old-Timer with bantering benediction.

"MAC," said Pomeroy, and McConnell colored and shifted his feet at the public diminutive, as sheepishly happy as a doughboy decorated and kissed by Foch before his regiment, "Mac" he said, "will you go with me to the prefect's? We've got to patch up that near-riot and some arrests the police made. Does the old boy savvy English?"

"No."

"Then you're elected interpreter. It's up to you to do the fixing, Mac. Come along."

Pomeroy linked McConnell's arm. And thus it was—arm-in-arm and "Mac" all the way, which led past the house which for six years he had shared with Omume and the gold fish and his books. McConnell jerked a short nod toward it.

"My hangout— Might drop in and have a cup of tea, Major, on our way back."

The major caught a note of diffidence in the invitation, which made him thoughtful. He noted that the *shodzi* panels made opaque white squares and oblongs amidst the hanging wistaria, and that meant a light behind—a vigil lamp still burning. Well, if ever man needed some one to look after him, this thinnish, flat-chested fellow did. But the diffidence of the invitation—The major believed he understood, and considerately made no answer. He noted that McConnell was hurrying, as if anxious to get past the house and away from a sentiment. Or was he merely anxious about those fellows in jail?

Pomeroy explored the labyrinths of the emotions, the experiences that might lie behind Mac's scurrying hurry; he went back over their brief acquaintance, reviewing a hundred flashes and attitudes of the teacher. A duller man than the major could hardly have missed McConnell's pathetic eagerness to serve his countrymen.

The thin arm hooked in Pomeroy's snagged like a caught fishline, but half recovering, McConnell plunged on groggily. The excitements of the day had been exhausting, and McConnell had not eaten. He was having trouble, too, with a thing that sat on his chest. A cold sweat was on him. But in his despair, an idea, a hope was taking shape in his mind.

"I'm all right; nothing wrong with me."

He would have liked to fling out his proposal at the major. A sea voyage would be just the thing—a trip with the boys. The vision carried him away—he could see himself in olive drab—one of the men—serving. But all the time fear of a good-humored rebuff kept him silent—and in the back of his mind was that pitiful picture of Omume when he had shot out of the house that morning, or yesterday morning, it may have been.

He wanted to fight the thing out—go on thinking, yet was relieved because they reached the prefect's before he had spoken the proposal in his mind. The prefect's was also the jail, as was evident in strong, jeering American voices from somewhere in the rear.

"Oh, mama!" "I don't like this." "Push the button an' order a stack of hots." "Oh bo-o-oy! Call the Y man."

Something akin to a fury of indignation swamped McConnell's personal poignancies. Fuming, he awaited the tardy appearance of the prefect, whose delay when he did appear was explained by the grandeur of a dress uniform.

The prefect bowed low to the major and inclined his head slightly to the schoolmaster. McConnell had to sit on his rage

over the incarceration of the American fighting men—had to choke down all the swelling indignation and assume an ambassadorial fervor—tender explanations, exchange apologies—cast oil on the waters of outraged law and order and race sensitiveness; had to flatter the medallioned, smirking, moon-faced prefect.

"Men full of spirit— Weeks of confinement aboard ship— His Excellency would understand."

At last a baker's dozen of rebellious figures in disarrayed uniform flung in from the cells on murder and riot bent, but jacked up at sight of Pomeroy and dropped hands to sides, and stiffened along the wall, and tried hard to find a focus for their shamed eyes. Pomeroy gave them a searing lecture and curt dismissal:

"Get down to the movie theater. Major Pomeroy's compliments to Captain Adams, and will he get the men to the docks and on board as soon as the water's safe."

Again arm-in-arm, the major and McConnell set forth. It seemed as if suddenly they were without anything to talk about. When at last Pomeroy did speak it was almost curtly, as if the silence disturbed him.

"Well Mac, this is pretty near the wind-up. Me for the transport—and Siberia; you to your—"

McConnell choked. His head seemed about to burst, but he spoke fiercely—

"Yep, to my teaching!" All the blankness of a futile life was in that utterance, but he spoke with bravado.

"Hm," the major said. He was on the point of weighing the situation, and expressing a measured opinion. But a chance sight of McConnell's eyes, glazed with despair, caused him to remark easily—

"Well, you needn't stay over here too long you know; don't miss too many boats."

"Oh, no," McConnell said tonelessly; then added almost in a whisper, "but a little while perhaps."

This marked the end of pretense. McConnell raised his head, clutched the major's arm in supplication.

"Major, for ——'s sake, can you use me any way over there. Can you?" He shook Pomeroy's arm bruskly. A glimmer of the fleeting hope had come back; Omume, his cough—he flung these out of mind, and waited for an answer, flushed with eagerness.

Silent, the major appraised McConnell, setting friendship aside, counting the costs. Then he spoke in a rush of good cheer, the words tumbling out joyously:

"Civilian interpreter; just the ticket to deal with the Japanese. I should have thought of it back there while you were dickering with the prefect." He flung his arm around McConnell and shook him. "Say, man, let's talk it over."

With an effort at casualness, McConnell suggested his house for tea. They strode down the narrow streetway, McConnell swelling his meager chest at times to make himself more congruous with the strapping man at his side.

Omume saw the two men enter the garden, and hurried from the window in fright. Afraid, yes—but how quickly she would change her heavy heart to joy—if there proved to be no danger in the strange white man's visit. She raked the coals to life in the charcoal *hibachi* and made sure the water was steaming, then withdrew behind a screen where she could peek modestly and listen unseen.

"Sorry as I can be," in a matter of fact tone from McConnell as he stepped aside at the threshold to let Pomeroy enter. "Sorry you can't meet Mrs. McConnell; she's down at Tokio for a week."

"And so am I sorry. Lonesome for you, eh?"

"But the maid is here. She takes care of everything."

The major's back was to McConnell; he dipped a finger in the glass pond and stirred the goldfish into frantic motion. McConnell felt himself unnerved because further comment—unnecessarily prolonged explanation was rising unbidden to his lips.

"Yes, a very good maid; she's been with us a long time. We think a good deal of her, Mrs. McConnell and I."

Glancing again at McConnell, quizzically, Pomeroy said—

"I see." And dried his hand on a handkerchief, then passed it exploringly over the surface of a samurai swordsman, embroidered on a wall piece. "Great hands at all sorts of queer artistic stuff," he remarked to himself abstractedly, and moved on from one knick-knack to another.

"Yes, I can't tell you how sorry Mrs. McCon—" McConnell stopped at the hollow ring of his words.

"ANOTHER time then, I hope," the major answered. Completing his round of the apartment, he cast a final glance about, as though trying to picture a white man *living* there.

"Omume!" McConnell called, and clapped his hands together deliberately, as a beginner does in the game of "bean porridge." Never before had he summoned her in that curt manner, but the major would expect to find that sort of thing in the Orient.

The girl slipped into view, kneeled, and made a toyland bow clear to the floor. After raising her head from the obeisance she remained on her knees, hands clasped in her lap, and with grave, wide eyes, searched McConnell's face for a sign. The answering look was stern and formal—masked.

"Make tea, quickly."

With that, Omume knew. The man had given the cue, and she would obey. With her thumb, she coaxed a ring from her fourth finger, and for the merest fraction of a minute, squeezed it tightly in her palm as though to impress the memory of it, and all that it meant. She came forward then, with lowered eyes, to brew the tea.

Pomeroy was watching the girl's quaint movements all the time. What was it she slipped so quickly into the shadow back of the bronze vase? It took a second invitation from McConnell to rouse him from playing with this query, and draw him to a cushion.

The ceremony of the tea was finished in silence, and Omume withdrew. Time had come again for words. McConnell was faint. His assurance was gone. He reached many decisions, but each destroyed the one preceding. Baffled, he spoke of his people at home, and asked if he might go and fetch a photograph of his little sister—it just came from the States.

Left alone, Pomeroy was impatient of McConnell's temporizing. He felt Omume's presence behind him and turned to look at her there in the shadow. She didn't alter her expression or divert her gaze, but kept her eyes fixed on him with the naïve fear of a child.

The major rose from the floor, stepped over to the vase, and raked the matting at its base with his fingers. Omume shrank then, timidly, and cloaked her face in a sleeve of her kimono.

From the rear of the house somewhere, came a hollow bang, the way a chest lid falls. McConnell would return in a minute.

"Somehow," the major muttered, looking at the plain ring he had picked from its hiding place, "I knew it was that." He smiled at Omume—a pitying smile. His ears caught the sound of footsteps; Pomeroy darted a quick glance at Omume's screened face, then dropped the golden circlet where he had picked it up. "Poor little kid, it's tough on you," he muttered, and with that passing surge of sympathy he closed the incident and turned toward the door where McConnell would enter.

For a time Pomeroy listened to McConnel's rambling talk. He looked dutifully at the photograph. Then he squared his shoulders as though to give purpose to his words.

"Now then, Mac, we've got to work fast, and get lined out for Siberia."

McConnell affected not to hear; he took the neglected portrait from the major's hand, and studied the girlish face.

"I can't imagine her being grown—she was so little."

"They grow up fast all right. Now, Mac, we haven't much time to arrange your—"

"But the picture is proof enough she has grown." McConnell was sure he wasn't fooling the major a bit. He was conscious of the steady gaze which sought to attract him. His slender shoulders contracted as if under an impending blow.

Suddenly he drew up straight. His sham absorption in the photograph would serve no longer, and he was glad to be forced into the open.

"Why Major, about that wild scheme we mentioned—" Words failed him, but he moved determinedly to Omume, and stood protectively above her drooped, small figure on the floor. The tableau told its own message.

When the major wrenched his eyes up for a last look at McConnell's face, the eyes he met were set in a fluid of hot anguish.

"I thought you'd come through like that—old boy."

Pomeroy hurried away toward the street. In his blind haste he brushed against a cherry bough, which kept on swaying a good while after he was gone from sight below the terrace.

THE window panel was closed when the big gray ship with decks packed with men in olive drab, glided out through the narrows and headed into the open seas to the westward. McConnell was sunk in his chair, gripping the sides and holding himself down. Omume had slipped away to tell his pupils there would be no school that day. As she tripped through the garden, a pretty conceit formed itself lazily in her little head: Tomorrow when he was rested enough to go with her to look, the cherry blossoms would be blooming at their best, pungent cherry blossoms which aided forgetfulness; and McConnell had told her many times that cherry flowers were the next-best treasure of Japan.

RAPID FIRE

by ARTHUR WOODWARD

IN THIS day of modern repeaters, ten shots a minute is not considered as extraordinary, but in the days of the flintlock when a man discharged six shots in a minute he was nothing short of a marvel.

Such a man was Nathaniel Foster, a hunter and trapper who lived in northern New York during the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century. He was born in Hinsdale, Windham County, Vermont, in 1767. About 1793 he moved to Salisbury in Herkimer County, New York where he remained for a number of years. He died at Boonville, Oneida County, New York, in March, 1841.

During his youth and middle age, Foster was well known as a crack shot, a most successful hunter and trapper and an Indian hater.

He is described as having been a tall man, nearly six feet high, well built, muscular, and able to stand a great deal of hard knocks. His eyes were dark and piercing, complexion rather sallow, and hair a sandy brown. He wore the habitual garb of the hunter, buckskin or tow hunting shirt, trousers of the same material, thin-soled moccasins and fur cap.

In his earlier hunting trips he carried a flintlock, and with that weapon he won his fame as an expert shot. In later years he owned a double-barreled rifle, known as a "double-shotter," percussion-lock, manufactured for him by one Willis Avery of Salisbury.

Foster had large, bony hands, and when hunting, or shooting, at a mark, he carried three rifle balls between the fingers of each hand. This eccentricity, through long years of practise, wore deep cavities between his digital members; so that the bullets, when in their places, were concealed from the average observer.

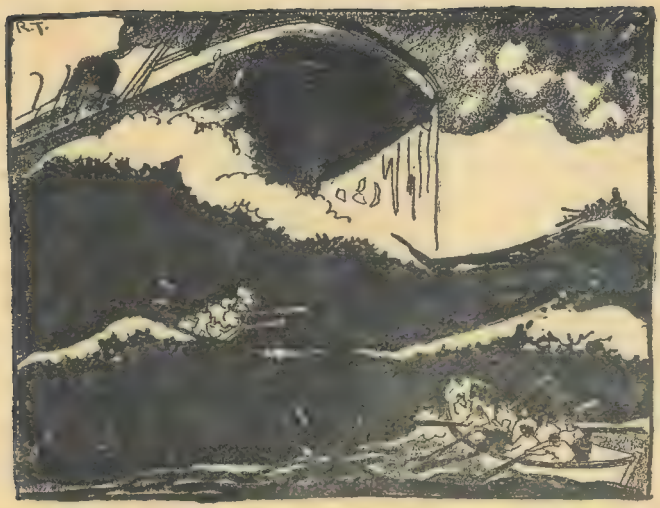
This habit, plus his skill of handling his powder charger, enabled him to perform the seemingly impossible feat of loading and firing his flintlock at the rate of six shots a minute. It is related that he repeatedly performed this stunt when he could get some one to bet with him.

His brother, Shubael Foster, told of one such match that occurred during the war of 1812 between Nat Foster and a rifleman by the name of Robinson, a South Carolina backwoodsman in the rifle company of Captain Forsyth.

The captain hearing of Foster's ability and knowing that Robinson was a shot par excellence, offered to bet that the South Carolinian could beat the New Yorker, and the match was on.

Targets were set up at a distance of ten rods and each man began to load at a given signal. Foster carried specially pared balls, small enough to slide down the barrel without trouble, and unpatched. To prime his weapon he simply gave the breech a smart slap with his hand thus throwing powder through the touch-hole into the pan.

In this particular match, Foster had discharged his sixth ball into the target before his opponent had succeeded in loading his weapon for the last shot. So taken was the captain with Foster's skill, that he offered him a place in his company, at thirty dollars a month, with the privilege of eating at the captain's table, but Foster, being a free trapper, couldn't stomach the idea of martial discipline, and declined the offer.



Ho-Ho-Ho!

by Albert Richard Wetjen

Author of "Exactly," "That Pair of Shoulders," etc.

"—and it is rather fortunate for nations that their ships are not manned by gentlemen."

CAPTAIN MILLIGAN was built like a bull. His neck was thick and short; fat was his face. His shoulders were bulky slabs of muscle that shook when he laughed, and he was always laughing. He had been born with a sense of humor that nothing could destroy. The very jovialness of him got on the nerves of many men, but the majority liked him, laughed with him, loved him. He never had to command. When he wanted a thing done he asked pleasantly and chuckled and amazingly his request was carried out with a cheerfulness on the part of otherwise surly seamen and in a fashion that caused other masters of the craft to swear and scratch their heads.

It was:

"Ha-ha-ha! Didja see that gal look at me, Mister Throstle? Bet she thought 'Wot's that big slob laughin' at?' Ho-ho-ho!" Or else, "Wot's th' matter with th' grub? Ha-ha-ha! Too much booze afore ye came aboard, eh? Ho-ho-ho!" and disgruntled men from the stokehold would forget their complaints over food and grin back. That laugh was like a tonic. The *Old Calabar* carried an eternally grinning crew, save for Mr. Throstle, the mate, who had dyspepsia. And whenever Captain Milligan laughed his whole fat bulk shook like jelly. You could hear the bull's bellow of him through the scream of a gale and over the crash of breaking seas. He made men chuckle in the teeth of death. Ropes were easier to pull on when he stood by, the heaviest holystone moved with lightness and ease when the fat face beamed from over the bridge-rail and the hearty voice talked.

"Clean as a pin, m'boys. Ha-ha-ha! Decks fer a queen t' eat off. That's th' stuff to put yer back up. Ho-ho-ho!"

Today the *Old Calabar* was steaming from New Orleans with manufactured goods for Rio. Captain Milligan was finding great amusement in the levee that lined the Mississippi's banks, "Funny little wall," he called it and kept persistently poking the pilot in the ribs, much to that sedate gentleman's annoyance. The pilot's annoyance was shared by Mr. Throstle who looked upon his commander as some strange animal, a little touched in the upper story, and a person who vastly wore on his nerves. But the helmsman was grinning behind the wheel and the third mate sniggered at the telegraph. And somehow, to all the crew laboring on the porty-dirty decks, the ship seemed to literally lilt down the mighty river towards the mightier gulf. They even sang, and that *is* unusual for a forecastle gang after a week in port and a night in a saloon down the Creole quarter.

The pilot left at last as the *Old Calabar* steamed by his station and a very relieved

man he was. He confided to a fellow pilot who had just been dropped from a monster United Fruit Company boat:

"The Old Man of that packet's looney. Crazy as they make 'em. Asked me if I was ever mistaken for a goat. Can't a man wear a beard without every cussed skipper remarking about it. Laughed like a hyena all the time. Fool!"

And from the bridge of the *Old Calabar* as she left the station behind, Captain Milligan waved farewell and shook all over. "Ha-ha-ha!" Life was so very funny. The sun shone. The grass was green along the shore. The sea was blue. "Ho-ho-ho!" And Mr. Throstle groaned and croaked "Bah!" deep in his stringy throat.

THREE days out from New Orleans the *Old Calabar* snored into the teeth of a gale. High roaring combers climbed up her bows, broke over the catheads and smothered the foredeck in a welter of white and green, so that spray, crashing against the bridge bulkhead, cascaded over the rail to the navigation-bridge itself. The sky was leaden and gray. Low masses of vapor clouded the horizon. The glass was low and still dropping.

Before night the tramp lost the starboard fiddley and the starboard bridge-boat. An immense, lone sea, strangely coming almost at right angles to the general current, towered and fell. When the water cleared away and the *Old Calabar* staggered to an even keel, fragments of wood swung from the davit-falls but of boats there was no actual sign.

The helmsman was jarred from the wheel and brought up crack against the wheel-house door. He regained his balance, spitting oaths and rubbing a tingling elbow. The second mate sprawled helpless along wet planking almost to the companionhead. Mr. Throstle in the saloon, trying to eat bread and milk, received the contents of his bowl in his lap and was inarticulate from sheer rage. Some of the seamen who had been standing in the fiddley doorway with the boatswain were sent reeling back across the gratings, and one had his fingers pulped when the steel door slammed shut. But Captain Milligan was picking himself up from a corner of the bridge-wing, as agile as a boy and roaring with laughter. He bellowed to the angry second mate:

"Didja hear th' pots in th' galley go, Mister? Ha-ha-ha! Bet th' cook's cursin' t' beat th' band."

The captain's red face was shining with spray and good health. His eyes blazed with the fun of the thing. His vast shoulders quivered and shook and he yelled at last:

"Port th' 'elm a bit— Didja hear th' pots, Mister? Ho-ho-ho!"

And the second mate forgot his bruises and chuckled back. And the helmsman ceased to rub his elbow and spun the spokes and answered cheerily—

"Port a bit, sir."

After all it was funny to think of the lean Scotch cook clawing about a swamped galley with his pots floating madly from side to side every time the *Old Calabar* rolled.

There was the sound of sea-boots on the companion steps and a seaman came to view, one hand dripping blood and his face white as a sheet. He staggered to the captain and his lips moved but the wind whisked the words away. The captain glanced at him and lumbered forward.

"An' wot 'ave you bin doin'? Smashed yer 'and in th' fiddley door? Ha-ha-ha! You're a fine un, ain't yer? Did yer think you could stop th' door? Get the medicine-chest up, Mister. Th' steward ain't no good at doctoring. Tryin' t' get a lay-off work, eh? Ha-ha-ha! I know yer. Malingerin', that's wot. Let's 'ave a look. I ain't a-goin' to 'urt yer—steady! Ain't th' old packet rollin'? Like one o' them there roundabouts at th' circus— You ain't a-goin' t' faint. Tryin' t' get a tot o' rum, eh? I know yer. Ha-ha-ha!"

The second mate came running back with the medicine-chest and held it while the captain performed first-aid on the pulped fingers.

"Might 'ave t' take 'em off later," the captain roared. "Wot'll yer 'ave, gents? Nice slab o' raw beef? Piece o' sirloin? You're all right. Ho-ho-ho! Hold up! Catch him, Mister!— —— bad smash. Where's yer whistle? Blow fer a man. That's it."

A seaman came running on the bridge. The captain screwed his head towards him and yelled:

"Get a glass o' brandy from th' steward. Snappy, m' boy—Johnson's got terribly tired an's 'aving a sleep. Lift his arm— so— You're all right! What's th' course,

elmsman? Bring 'er two points more t' th' wind— 'E c'n stand now, can't yer, m' boy? No more wheels fer you fer a while. Swingin' th' lead, eh? Ho-ho-ho!"

He slapped the seaman on the back and the man grinned, shakily it was true, but still he grinned and the color ebbed back to his face. The man who had been sent for the brandy came back on the run and gave a half-filled glass to the captain.

He lifted it and touched it to his lips.

"Gotta taste it, m' boy. Ha-ha-ha! Blood allus makes me nervous. Knock it back. So— Now get along for'ard and don't lemme see yer on deck again this side of Rio or I'll log you sure. Ho-ho-ho! You betcher life I will."

The seaman went away and the captain and the second mate resumed their vigil on the storm-wracked bridge. Eight bells went soon after and Mr. Throstle came sourly up, swathed in oilskins, to relieve the second. He was extremely worried.

"We're shipping a lot of water, sir," he ventured with a frown. "I don't like it. Do you think we ought to turn and run before it?"

The captain looked surprized and then chuckled.

"Turn a full-powered steamship t' run afore a cap full o' wind? Course we won't— Ha-ha-ha! This ole packet ain't got dyspepsy, Mister. Not 'er. Her innards are sound an' look 'ow she shoves 'er nose into it— Ho-ho-ho! Can't you feel 'er laughin'? —— good ship. Turn an' run?"

"I don't see how you can laugh with this weather," snorted Mr. Throstle. He had been with the captain for ten years and was privileged. "I believe it's a disease with you."

"That's it, Mister. Gotta sort o' itching under th' 'eart. —— bad 'abit— Ha-ha-ha! Ain't you got a laugh inside somewheres you c'd find? Ho-ho-ho!"

"Well, you needn't poke my ribs in," snapped Mr. Throstle and stalked indignantly to the other wing of the bridge. The captain chuckled louder than ever and went to have a look at the compass.

IT WAS nearly midnight when disaster overwhelmed the *Old Calabar*. A gigantic sea towered over the fore-deck, fell, broke through both number one and number two hatch and poured tons of water into the holds. The cargo shifted. The *Old Calabar* heeled to port, remained there and started to settle by the head, very slowly but none the less surely. Another sea climbed the rail and went down the hold. The boatswain and four men, vainly trying to get from the forecastle with a tarpaulin to cover the gaping void in the deck, were swept away. Those on the bridge tried to bring the ship before the wind and sea but she was slow turning in the trough and her decks were swept again and again. Her foreholds were half full of water and taking in more every moment. If the bulkheads had not held so long as they did, every soul on board would have perished then and there. But for a while they remained sound, credit for which was due to certain Scotchmen who had pieced them together on the Clyde long ago.

The *Old Calabar* came round before the wind and was hurled forward on the shoulder of a curving swell. Her foredeck was no longer swept by breakers but it was too late to get tarpaulins over the wrecked hatches. There was too much water below. She was too far down by the head and water was covering the fore-deck continuously in a mad swirling as the scuppers dropped level with the surface. True, men tried and they succeeded in covering the hatches. But seas aft were breaking into number four and five holds.

"She's finished," said Captain Milligan quietly, glancing over his ship. He stood with legs astride at the head of the port-companion. "Where's the lamp-trimmer? Get for'ard with some men and bust a drum o' oil on th' fore-deck—Mister Throstle, see th' boats are all right. We'll 'ave a lee when she comes broadside on again— Get some oil in a canvas bag and drop it over th' weather side— She's turnin' now. It'll be th' starboard. Snappy. She 'asn't long."

The captain's usually florid face was white. He was tense and still. His fat hands were clenched into fists. His eyes were stony and hard. It is not easy for a master of the craft to watch his ship foundering under his feet.

The stokehold gang was pouring up from the fiddley. Greasers and engineers belched from the engine-room doors. From below came a terrible hissing of steam and some one shouted, "Th' bulkhead's gone!" but his voice was a mere whisper in the choking

wind. The bulkhead had not gone—it was merely leaking, but the eventual result would be the same. In the galley the cook was bluing the air with profanity and nursing a blistered arm that had met the red-hot stove top when the *Old Calabar* heeled on her beam ends.

Captain Milligan, his papers in his pocket, his chronometer, sextant, "Nautical Almanac" and some hastily folded charts in a little brown bag, came down from the bridge and dodged seas until he reached the fiddley where seamen were clearing the sound boats away. The *Old Calabar* lay broadside to the seas and the starboard, which was the weather side, shipped water every half a minute. They managed to lower the port boats, the men going down in them fending off with oars from the steel hull as the swell lifted them against it. But for the film of oil, fast-spreading from the punctured drum and the canvas bag slung over the weather side, every boat would have been swamped.

One, full of men, drew clear, hove out a sea-anchor, hove out a smaller canvas bag full of oil and was content to ride the swells in comparative safety. Another boat got safely away from the poop. Not until the majority of his men were all clear did Captain Milligan clamber back to the bridge over the streaming decks. He had left with him the chief engineer, several seamen and firemen, the saloon steward and Mr. Throstle. It was nervy work lowering the port bridge boat but it was accomplished at last. Once, while slacking the fall round the davit-cleat, an oil-covered comber swirled over from a starboard and sucked across the bridge in a smooth boiling to send Mr. Throstle sprawling against the after-bridge-rail. If he hadn't caught hold of a loose gripe-lanyard he would have gone overside. He arose, spitting salt water and oil and cursing viciously. By some miracle the abruptly released fall half hitched itself round the cleat so the boat was not upended.

Captain Milligan bellowed, after a quiet look to see there was no injury:

"Ha-ha-ha! Didja see Mister Throstle? Knocked over by a squirt of water! Like a blinkin' starfish. Ho-ho-ho!" And the others found time to grin as they piled over the gunnels and pushed out the oars to fend the frail craft from the steel hull.

She was clear at last, riding in an artificial calmness induced by the oil. She joined the other boats at their sea-anchors and the *Old Calabar* foundered with deliberate slowness, lifted and hurled down by the march of the uneasy waters. As she sank men watched with white faces and grim mouths. They were a long way from harbor. They were in the tropics and water was limited. How many crews before had perished under the blazing sun?

There was pain in Captain Milligan's heart and blackness in his eyes but he wheezed:

"Didja see it? Like a bloomin' starfish. Ho-ho-ho!"

And somehow the terrors of hardship and thirst did not seem so near or so great. Only Mr. Throstle was angry and scowling as he gingerly ran fingers round the inside of his collar to clear away the thick oil that had found haven there.

CAPTAIN MILLIGAN'S boat was alone. He could look all around and there was no sign of life, unless the triangular fins curving near him could be called life. The other boats had been separated from him two nights ago. He hoped they had reached shore. He feared they hadn't. It was a long way and after the gale had died there had been no wind. Nothing but calmness and heat, a blazing sun by day and a mocking coolness by night that started men coughing with pains in the chest until they were too thirsty to cough.

The sea heaved and sank in long low swells, glass-smooth, bottle-green. The sky was an unstained blue vault. The stars at night hung so low you could reach up and touch them. The scanty boat's sail afforded small shade of relief. The two water breakers grew daily emptier and emptier. Another day and they would be dry. And if the wind failed to come the men that huddled around the breakers would be dry too, dry and withered, mummified by heat.

There was a boy in the boat, a young ordinary seaman whose head had been badly battered by a swinging block from the davit-fall. He had gone into some sort of fever from which he awoke at long intervals to croak for water. The men ignored him but Captain Milligan's share trickled past the hot lips and brought a flicker of gratitude to the glazed blue eyes.

"Water?" the captain would bellow. "Wot do ye all want water for? Ha-ha-ha! Fine bunch o' seamen. Water's only good t' wash an' cook with. Me, I take m' licker straight. Ho-ho-ho!"

But that was at first, and at first men grinned at his broad jovial face and the quivering laughing bulk of him. Later they scowled when he spoke so and cursed his humor. His very words annoyed them. He had not drunk himself in three days, save for a few sips each noon. He had no right to be able to talk, let alone laugh like that.

They threatened to kill him but at that his laughter only grew more immense and they subsided muttering. They never knew the desperate minutes he spent at night licking the dew from the gunnels and the oars before they learned to lick it themselves.

On the fifth day the water was finished. The sea still marched stately and glass-like from horizon to horizon. The sun still blazed in the unstained sky. There was no sign of wind, not the slightest sign. There was no sign of rain. Nor was there a sign of a ship or the other boats. They were alone in a fragment of curved wood on a vast bosom of water.

There was no hope.

They sunk into a torpor. The steward went mad and dived into the sea. The triangular fins got him. The captain gave his last few drops of preciously hoarded liquid to the boy on the bottom-boards and with a hoarse chuckle ran his own swollen tongue over his cracked lips.

"Fine bunch o' scarecrows," he managed. "Like a lot o' dogs wot's bin eatin' salmon. Ho-ho-ho!" But they raised heavy heads and looked at him dully and with sullen malevolence and cursed him in their souls. Yet he kept them alive by the sheer excess of spirit that flowed from him. His infrequent garrulity, his bursts of horrible chuckling, roused them to consciousness when they were sinking into the last stages. What tortures it cost him only Captain Milligan knew. But perhaps inside he really did think it was all very funny. Certain it was that even when he failed to speak or laugh his now thinning bulk would shake and tremble and his eyes light with laughter that rocked inside him. But there was no sign of wind, and there was no hint of rain.

IT WAS the morning after the end of the water when the captain saw the smoke. He was standing up in the glory of the young dawn and searching the horizon out of sun-weary eyes that barely were able to squint from between puffed lids. It was in the south, a long level stream of dark vapor and coming towards them. He stumbled about the boat chuckling and kicking every one he struck against.

"Water ye want? There 'tis. Comin' along at th' rate o'knots. Ha-ha-ha! But wot ye sh'd want water for I can't guess. Only good fer cookin' an' washin'. I know. Ho-ho-ho!" The last was a mere mumble, hardly intelligible but the mention of water brought heads up and forced tired eyes open.

Long before the steamer herself was apparent every man was sitting up and watching the smoke with eagerness.

She was a big brute of a Nelson liner, Buenos Aires to Liverpool. Her tiered decks were alive with passengers. Her sides gleamed in the sun with clean paintwork and brass port-rims. She dominated the tropic calm even as it dominated the lifeboat of the *Old Calabar*. There was no need for Captain Milligan to stand in the stern sheets and wave.

"Come on, ye ole tin can. Watcher mean b' keepin' a lady waiting? Bin 'ere fer a long time expectin' ye. Ho-ho-ho! C'n ye 'ear 'er skipper pullin' th' corks, m'boys? Watcher want water fer? Only good fer cookin'—" But his speech was wasted for all the men were staring intently at the white-painted ship's boat dancing toward them across the bottle-green swells. It drew alongside, gunnel rasping to gunnel and the keen eyes of the officer in charge took in the situation with all the quick sympathy that is the heritage of the sea.

"Hop aboard, old-timers—Jones, get in and lend them a hand. Poor ——, they're weak as cats—*Old Calabar* out of New Orleans, eh? We picked up two of your boats the day before yesterday— You'll soon be fixed now."

They were pulling back for the motionless graceful liner and a thousand pairs of eyes watched their progress. The seamen and firemen slumped on the bottom boards with flushed, sun-blistered faces and licked eager lips in anticipation. But Captain Milligan was on his knees by the officer in

the stern sheets and shaking with Gargantuan laughter.

"Ha-ha-ha! Gotta come two thousan' miles fer a boat ride. An' m'complexshun's rooin'd by th' blinkin' sun. Ho-ho-ho! M'complexshun." His voice caught and broke towards the end so that he coughed and blood came to his cracked lips.

He was weakest of all his boat's crew physically for all his efforts at speech and his laughter-shaking. The others managed to clamber up a gangway with the aid of a man but Captain Milligan had to be lifted aboard in a bowline. They had him on the deck at last and two or three hundred curious passengers clustered round him with exclamations of pity.

He no longer resembled a bull. He was pinched and blistered, haggard and old. But nothing could take the massive shoulders from him nor the strong set of the jaw. As the liner's captain forced a way between unwilling bodies he saw Captain Milligan straighten slowly and look around. Then swaying on his feet, peering out of dulled eyes, the one time powerful voice croaked in a last effort.

"Look arter me men— Give 'em water. Ha-ha-ha!" The sound was horribly cracked and rasping. "They want water—only good fer washin' an' cookin'— Ho-ho-ho!"

Then he toppled over. They picked him up and carried him into the cool saloon and they thought him mad. But the liner's captain knew that the other was not mad at all. He was merely a master of the craft doing as they all did, a bit more than he was paid for.

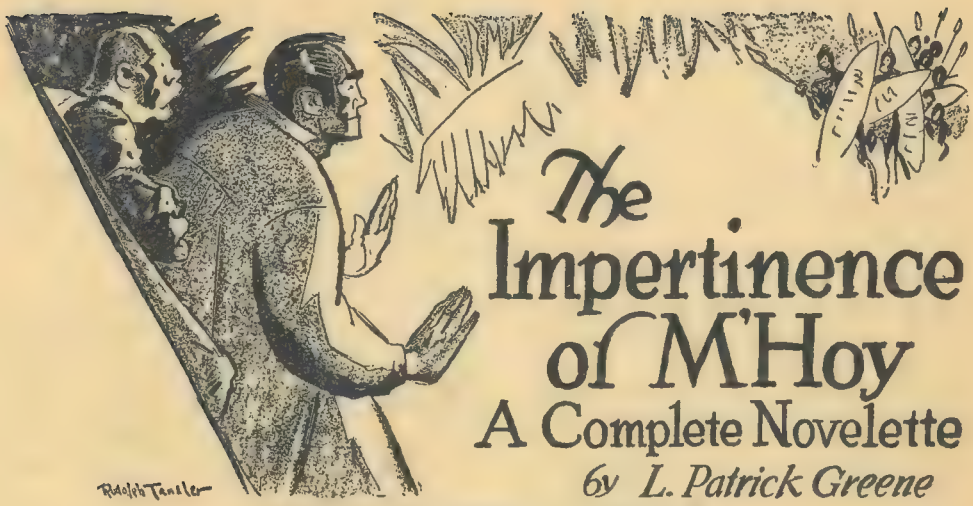
WÓKAS

by F. W. Hodge

THERE are many important wild food-plants used by the Indians of the Far West, one of which is *wókas*, a staple among the tribes of Oregon and northern California. This is the great yellow-water-lily—the *Nymphæa polysepala* of botanists—which takes its common name from the related dialects of Klamath and Modoc. In the marshes this plant grows very abundantly, covering thousands of acres. The harvest is garnered late in the summer and early autumn by the Indian women, who pull the almost ripe seed-pods from the stems and drop them in their canoes. The day's harvest is placed in a small pit, covered with a mat, and allowed to ferment; then the mass is transferred to a canoe—the largest receptacle available—and by the admixture of water the seeds drop to the bottom. The liquid is then drained off, and the seeds are spread on mats and partly dried, but later are further dried and partly cooked by shaking in a basket tray with a few embers. Next the seeds are hulled with a metate and muller, and kernels and hulls are separated in a flat winnowing basket; then the edible product is thoroughly dried and stored in bags. When parched, the seed kernels swell and burst, somewhat like popcorn, and in this state make a very palatable food.

The immature *wókas* pods are treated by spreading on the ground to a depth of six or eight inches, and in about ten days the uppermost layer, that is, the pods exposed to the sun, are dry enough to be crushed with a pestle on a mat, when the seeds are winnowed out as before. The remaining pods, however, now partly decomposed, are crushed as they lie, and are spread more thinly, and when dry the seeds are separated from the pods by the winnowing process, and usually are cooked by boiling into a mush. Nowadays the Indians have abandoned the more primitive process of preparing the *wókas* to the extent of employing utensils obtained in trade.

The importance of wild growths to such tribes as those of California, who were in no sense agriculturists, was very great indeed. Such food products as acorns, *wókas* and other seeds, and roots and berries, could be had for the labor of gathering, and Nature usually supplied one or the other in sufficient abundance to make tillage unnecessary.



The Impertinence of M'Hoy

A Complete Novelette

by *L. Patrick Greene*

Author of "—and of Gideon!" "The Flame," etc.

"CASE dismissed! Next!" the Resident Native Commissioner barked and mopped his forehead with a large red handkerchief.

Everybody said that Percival Roe should have been a missionary. Certainly he had the facial characteristics of a most objectionable type of religious fanatic and he heightened the effect of his unctuous "holier than thou" expression with the stiff white collar, black felt hat and somber clothes he always wore, even during Rhodesia's hottest season.

But it wasn't that—a man can't help his face and he is not unduly criticized for his choice of clothes—that earned him his nickname. It was after men noticed his treatment of natives, heard him soulfully refer to them as his "dear black brothers," that they called him the "Reverend Percy."

Perhaps it was this—his loudly professed sympathy for and understanding of the natives—plus pull that influenced the powers that be to lift Percival Roe from his lowly seat in the counting-house and make him a Resident Native Commissioner.

The country had only just passed through a bloody rebellion—this was in 1897; after months of strenuous fighting the Matabele had come to the conclusion that mere man-flesh could not hope to wage a successful war against men armed with rifles and Maxims. So, not being altogether fools, they had signified their desire for peace, had come in and had given up their assegais in token of surrender. At the same time they boasted that they, the Matabele, the "vanishing people," had never been beaten in battle.

M'Hoy, a wily old savage, his kraals hidden in the heart of the hills, was the last of all the chiefs to seek peace and, it having been granted to him, proceeded to make matters as unpeaceful as possible for all those put in authority over him.

The first R. N. C. appointed to the district resigned because the powers that be refused to support the iron-hand policy which he insisted was essential if M'Hoy was ever to be brought to order. The powers that be, smarting under an accusation of "bestial brutality to our black brothers," which had appeared in *Missionary Chaff*, said that only as a last resort should force be used; otherwise, M'Hoy was to be handled with ultra-velvet gloves.

For a time the appointment went begging. None of the men who knew would accept it under those conditions. Then the high officials thought of Percival Roe and offered him the post. He promptly accepted it, and a slobbering letter full of religious gloatings appeared in *Missionary Chaff*, to the effect that the appointment marked a step forward and a district won for the cause.

There were times when Percival Roe longed for the flesh-pots of the counting-house and would have given everything he owned to be returned to safe and comfortable billet in Bulawayo. But these occasions were very rare—only occurred when he could not sleep nights because of the din of

tom-toms. At such times he realized how utterly alone he was and visualized what would happen if the natives rose in rebellion. He had grave doubts about the local detachment of police acting with sufficient promptness to save his skin; he was acutely aware of his unpopularity with them—from the O.C. down to the rawest recruit in the Black Watch.

On the whole, however, Percival Roe was very happy, and happiest when, as now, he held court and administered justice to the high, middle and low, to the white, the black and all shades in between.

These court days were the spice of life to Roe. He visibly expanded under the sycophantic homage the natives paid to him and the girth of his self-esteem increased every time he was able to lower the prestige of some unfortunate white man.

One grizzled prospector bitterly complained that there wasn't "any sich thing as justice in the ——'s court," but he had just been fined twenty pounds—having been found guilty of *sjamboking* a native—and he was undoubtedly biased. Also, to be quite fair, he *was* guilty; he admitted it. He had awakened just in time to prevent a native from murdering him, but not in time to avoid an ugly wound in the thigh. The nearest white man was over fifty miles away— Still, as the R. N. C. clearly pointed out, the prospector should have known better than to take the law into his own hands!

Roe glared now at the man on the witness stand—it was an old packing case; the words "corned beef" showed plainly through its coating of stain.

"Case dismissed," he roared, his face flushing a dangerous, apoplectic red, "Didn't you hear me?"

The man on the witness box did not move.

"Yes, sir. I heard you," he answered quietly, "but I am afraid you don't understand—" he hesitated.

"Understand what, Trooper Beamish?" Roe interjected coldly.

"The gravity of the complaint I have just made, sir."

"Um!" Roe stared thoughtfully at the trooper, regarding him as if he were some newly discovered species of insect.

Beamish flushed to the roots of his tow-colored hair under the scrutiny. He was very young and took his profession very seriously.

"Um!" said Roe again. "And you think, then, that you are competent to teach me my duty? You think—"

"No, sir," Beamish interrupted hastily. "It's not that—only I don't think Court Interpreter Daniel succeeded in translating the evidence of my native witnesses sufficiently well to—"

"And you—ah—could interpret better, I suppose?"

Beamish nodded confidently.

"I WAS born in the Transvaal, sir. I've been with natives all my life. I could jabber the vernacular fluently before I knew a word of English. Whereas Daniel—" a contemptuous note crept into his voice—"was only five years in a mission. Just long enough to give him a parrot-like knowledge of English and to forget his own people. That's all."

"You are very impertinent, sir." Roe said sharply. "Your attitude toward Court Interpreter Daniel is further proof, to my mind, that I have acted wisely in dismissing your absurd complaint. You are the sort of man who refers to natives as niggers and has nothing but contemptous hate for our black fellow subjects.

"Keep silent, sir," he continued as Beamish was about to make a heated protest. "You have already said enough. I consider you a dangerous man and an obstacle to the peaceful settlement of this district. I shall make a report to that effect to the Chief Police Commissioner—not to your local officer—asking for your discharge or transfer to some other district where your peculiar mental attitude will do no harm."

He cleared his throat pompously before continuing—

"And now, to assure you that I fully understand this case—" he became very sarcastic—"and its gravity, I will briefly recapitulate the facts as they were presented."

He leaned back in his chair, placed the tips of his fat fingers delicately together, pursed his full red lips and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"In the first place, then," he began in a deep, judicial voice, "—correct me if I'm wrong—you are a trooper of the British South Africa Police, stationed at a post which is in close proximity to the Kraal of M'Hoy, the chief of this district. You have under you a corporal and six privates

of the Black Watch. These native soldiery are—it is well to note here—men of a race who have always been considered unfriendly to the people of M'Hoy.

"In your complaint you state that the people in the immediate vicinity of your post have, encouraged thereto by their chief, done everything they could to make your task difficult and insulted—I believe you said insulted?"

"They threw filth at me, sir," Beamish interrupted sulkily and specified just what that filth was. "And once they—"

"That will do," R. N. C. Roe said quickly. "You have a fertile imagination and, apparently, find great delight in the repetition of words which are, to say the least, indelicate. We will let it go that they insulted you.

"You also claim that they robbed your stores, stampeded your mules and pack-donkeys and, on one occasion, waylaid and soundly thrashed two of your Black Watch. You further stated in your evidence that, having every reason to believe that the male inhabitants of the kraal of M'Hoy were harboring men wanted by the Crown for their part in the late rebellion; and hearing that they also possessed assegais—and perhaps guns—in defiance of the conditions of peace—having reason to believe all this, I say,—you ordered M'Hoy to escort you through all the huts in his kraal that you might thoroughly search them. When he refused, you endeavored to force your way into his hut, and, failing, ride here with your witnesses and ask me to issue a search warrant and detail a detachment of police large enough to enforce the warrant. That, I believe, is an accurate presentation of your case?"

He paused and looked at the trooper inquiringly.

"Yes, sir," Beamish replied quietly. He had himself well in hand now and didn't intend to be stampeded into another show of temper. "But I'd like to remind you, if I may, sir, that I put no great stress on the insults, the pilfering of my stores, the stampeding of animals, or, even, the beating of two members of the Black Watch—although one of the men is seriously injured.

"The gravity of the case, as I see it, sir, lies in the fact that Chief M'Hoy is actively working against the government; that, in addition to harboring wanted men and allowing his warriors to retain their assegais—and, possibly, guns—he is quietly biding his time, outwardly professing personal loyalty to you, and will when the bones indicate the propitious moment, launch another rebellion. He—"

Beamish stopped abruptly, realizing the futility of continuing. Roe's supercilious smile made him long to smash his fists in the man's fat face. He flushed red again. his muscles tensed and then a voice thickened by the cream of Devon, called softly from the back of the court-room.

"Ea-asy, la-ad!"

He pulled himself together then, saluted the Native Commissioner and turned to leave.

"Wait!" Roe snapped and Beamish turned again.

The Reverend Percy had not finished with him yet; had not delivered the final scathing blast which would damn the trooper and earn for him, Percival Roe, R. N. C., the applause of his black brothers.

"I HAVE merely outlined your case; now I will give you my—um—summing up," Roe continued, speaking very slowly now so that Daniel, the court interpreter, could translate for the benefit of the grinning natives. "You bring no unprejudiced witnesses to support your case. The only evidence you present is hearsay—that of your own or that of your men of the Black Watch—and such evidence can not be admitted in this court. Against that we have what? Here come Chief M'Hoy, the headmen of his kraals and the leading counselors of his district. They come here without malice toward you, but keenly anxious to protect their honor which you have attacked.

"To your accusations M'Hoy answers this: He regrets that certain of his people have failed, in some things, to coöperate with you—but adds that that is entirely due to your lack of tact and your brutal manner of dealing with these kind-hearted people. He admits that some of his young people got out of hand and threw—er—filth at you. He promises that they shall be punished—even though, through your own lack of courtesy, you fully merited the insult; he denies that his people pilfered your stores—and hints that your own men of the Black Watch were always well supplied with provisions which they bartered

for beer; he denies that his people were responsible for your animals stampeding and asks, with delightful naïve innocence—you needn't translate that, Daniel—how drunken men can tether animals securely. He admits the beating of the two men and again promises to punish the guilty ones, although they only sought to avenge their honor—your men had grossly insulted a woman.

"As to the rest, the chief M'Hoy and his people flatly deny it. And let me tell you, young man," Roe's voice quivered with righteous indignation and he shook an admonishing forefinger at Beamish, "let me tell you that you are very fortunate indeed to be alive at this moment—very fortunate. You had no right to attempt to force your way into the hut of Chief M'Hoy or to ask him to take you into the others. And remember this—an Englishman's house is his castle, and so is the hut of any one of our black subjects *his* castle. When Chief M'Hoy forcibly restrained you from entering his hut he was well within his rights—well within. He showed great forebearance, I think, in not going further.

"I have already said that I shall report your conduct to the Chief Commissioner of Police. That is all. Case dismissed. You may go."

Resident Native Commissioner Percival Roe sighed contentedly and leaning back in his chair, his hands clasped across his stomach, beamed paternally upon the mob of grinning, gesticulating natives who filled the well of the court.

Beamish looked at him—a little sorrowfully; *very* contemptuously—then turned quickly and left the place.

OUTSIDE the court Beamish was joined by a tall, black-mustached man who wore a sergeant's stripes on the sleeve of his tight fitting tunic. They ejaculated a string of curses, most uncomplimentary to Percival Roe, and then walked down the dusty road in silence until, coming opposite a rambling, tin roofed building with "King's Hotel" daubed along its front in huge, blood red letters, the sergeant said:

"Come and have a drink, la-ad. It'll take the ta-aste of that 'un out o' thy gizzard."

Beamish shook his head.

"No, thanks, Dave. I want to get out of the *dorp* right away."

"Quite right, la-ad. It's right that you should want to get back to your post. But it's a long three-day trek and a hour or so either way won't make any difference."

"It's not my post I'm worrying about, Dave. But *he* might come in for a soda water—court's almost over—and I don't know what I'd do if he smiled at me again as he did back there. I'd be tempted to shoot him, I think. He's not clean, Dave; he's got rabies!"

"Yiss, la-ad," the sergeant agreed. "Maybe he is a little ma-ad. But he won't come in here yet awhile. So come on."

"No!" Beamish said tensely. "I'm going to clear out right at once."

"And where are you going to, la-ad," the sergeant asked. He looked sharply at the other, noting his white face, his tensed jaw muscles and the strained, far-away look in his gray eyes.

"To——and gone, Dave," Beamish snapped and laughed harshly as the sergeant uttered a low-voiced curse of protest. "Better men than I am have left the force without bothering about a discharge. They're men of affairs now—most of them. And you know yourself that as far as any future in the police goes, I'm finished. Not that that matters so much, anyway; not compared to the rest. Dave, when I think of all the trouble that's storing up for this district because that big, fat-bellied, brainless —"

"Steady, la-ad," the sergeant said soothingly. "It'll all come out in the wa-sh. 'Course he's all that you say—and more. But he's only wind and—"

"Some winds can do a lot of damage, Dave," Beamish interrupted.

"Yiss, yiss. But he won't be able to hurt you, la-ad. You've got a good windbreak. What do you think the Old Man was in court for if—"

"Was he, Dave?" Beamish asked excitedly.

"He was," the sergeant said triumphantly, "an' he was there because he had an idea the Reverend Percy would ride you. So-a, la-ad, he'll write a report which'll make Percy's read like a fussy old hen's."

"Don't be so sure, Dave. Percy has a big pull and—"

"And so has Captain Murray, la-ad. He knows what it's all about; and so does the Chief Commissioner. An' they're not going to lose a smart young officer—you are up

for a commission, so they sa-ay—just to please that old wind-bag."

"Ah, go on now with your blarney, Dave. You ought to be an Irishman."

"Maybe," the big man chuckled complacently. "But what I'm tellin' you is true, just the same. Now come on and have a drink."

Beamish shook his head doubtfully but he followed the sergeant into the bar. There he was at once surrounded by a number of men—prospectors and ranchers, troopers of the B. S. A. P. and a local trader or two—all pressing him to have a drink and pulling his leg about his treatment by the R. N. C.

He was busily engaged for a time, emptying glasses, exchanging good-humored banter, and so did not see the Reverend Percy's fat face appear at the door opening. Neither did he hear the good-natured Sergeant Dave Higgins advise the R. N. C. to go elsewhere and then slam the door in his face.

But he did see Captain Murray—the two-fisted, fighting officer in command of his troop—enter and, in company with the other members of the force, sprang stiffly to attention.

"I'm not in uniform when I come in here," Captain Murray said with the grin which men had followed cheerfully through the hell of the rebellion. "Fill up! The drinks are on me."

At the door of a little room leading off the bar he paused for a moment to say—

"When you've satisfied your thirst, Beamish, I'd like to talk with you."

The door closed behind him and shortly after, Trooper Tom Beamish, first thumbing his nose as the men gloatingly prophesied that he was in for a severe "choking off," made his way into the little room.

"I won't keep you long, Beamish," the captain said, "but I was out on inspection duty when you arrived here from your post, and I want to know a little bit more about the M'Hoy affair. I wish that I could have had a talk with you before you presented your case to the Reverend—er—to the R. N. C. You knew, of course, I was in court?"

"I didn't until Sergeant Higgins told me, sir."

The captain nodded, drummed his fingers lightly on the table, murmured something to the effect that Sergeant Higgins' tongue would some day get him into trouble, and then, aloud—

"You haven't overestimated this trouble with M'Hoy, Beamish?" He looked sharply at the trooper.

"No, sir. Underestimated it if anything."

The captain nodded. He knew his man.

"Well, see here, Beamish. There's not a ——thing I can do at present. My hands are tied. As you know, the R. N. C. has full authority. Only in case of open revolt am I permitted to act on my own initiative."

"And then it will be too late, sir," Beamish exclaimed bitterly. "Of course if the fools did start another rebellion we could crush it almost immediately. But not before a lot of isolated settlers were wiped out, and it's a —— shame that they should be sacrificed because that pot-bellied—I beg your pardon, sir!"

"About time!" The captain smiled and rubbed the tip of his long nose. "But you're quite right, Beamish. About acting after it's too late, I mean," he added hurriedly. "That is," he thoughtfully amended, "we'd be too late in the ordinary course of events. The R. N. C. is not, apparently, satisfied with hearsay evidence, and quite right too. Well, then! Do you see?"

"I'm afraid I don't, sir."

"Tchat! And you're working for a commission! I'm disappointed, very disappointed, in you, Beamish. Let me make myself clearer. You are well convinced—undoubtedly with just cause; never mind about why you are convinced—that M'Hoy is harboring wanted men and permitting his warriors to retain their assegais."

"And perhaps guns," Beamish added.

The captain smiled.

"YOU'RE sure of the assegais—that's enough; quite enough for our purpose because if you can prove that's true we can force that wily old heathen, M'Hoy, to submit to a search of all his kraals—and, well, I'll direct that search myself. But first we have to convince the R. N. C. You must present him with stronger evidence."

"I don't see how I can, sir. He won't believe my witnesses—says they're prejudiced—and he takes M'Hoy's word before mine. You heard, sir?"

"Yes, I heard," the captain grunted wrathfully.

"So I don't see how I can give him stronger evidence—" Beamish was still

puzzled— "unless I get M'Hoy to stick me full of assegais—oh!—I think I see now what you mean, sir." He laughed softly.

The captain sighed with relief.

"I thought you would eventually, Beamish. But be sure you don't see too much. And I'd rather not know anything about the weird workings of your brain in this matter of obtaining evidence. Don't know, can't tell, you know. You understand? Sure?"

"Yes, sir. Fully."

"Good! That's all then. And—er—Sergeant Higgins recommended a health resort to the R. N. C. a little while ago and the R. N. C. spoke to me about it. Now I'd like to speak to Sergeant Higgins. Ask him to come in, will you? Thanks! Good luck!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Trooper Beamish. Then he saluted and left the room.

THE return to the post at M'Hoy was far from a pleasant experience for Trooper Beamish and the four native constables who had appeared as witnesses in the case of "The Crown *vs.* M'Hoy *et al.*" The bush telegraph had been at work and had very efficiently reported to all the kraals in the district the triumph of their chief and the downfall of Trooper Tom Beamish.

Consequently, instead of the trip being made in easy stages, with plenty of food for animals and men at each kraal they chose to make a resting-place, they were forced to trek hard and make their halts at some distance from kraals in order to avoid coming into open rupture with the natives.

The hardships of the trek did not bother Beamish or his men; neither were they greatly concerned about the danger—and it was very real. Any native armed with an assegai is dangerous when he is drunk, and all these natives were drunk on the intoxicating, ill-considered judgment—and all that it involved—of the R. N. C.; and all the men had assegais; they flaunted them in Beamish's face and laughed when he pretended not to see them.

But where threats did not move Beamish, the taunts and jeers of M'Hoy's people did. His hand was continually hovering about the butt of his revolver, and when one warrior—the man had followed them mile after mile, shouting obscene abuse—jabbed his assegai into the rump of Beamish's mule, shouting at the same time an unusually vile epithet, the revolver was half drawn from its holster.

The warrior was very near death then, would have died, but at that moment Beamish saw a movement in the thick bush to the left of the trail, caught the twinkle of an assegai head as it reflected the sun's rays. Beamish realized then—the thought came to him in a flash—that he was surrounded by warriors who were waiting for him to draw his revolver on the man who had been specially detailed for the purpose of riling him so that he would make the first hostile move. They were not yet sure enough of themselves to take the initiative; memories of the fearful execution of the Maxims in the last rebellion deterred them somewhat. But Beamish knew that his first shot would have been the signal for attack. Assegais would cut the air, he would be killed, his men would be killed and—this was the thought which inspired greater patience and caused his hand to fall from his revolver—the R. N. C. would say that he had been the aggressor, that his death and that of his men was justly deserved. On the face of it—not taking into consideration the important ramifications of the matter—Beamish knew that for once the R. N. C.'s verdict would be correct—that a man made vile faces and shouted obscene threats is not a sufficient reason for killing him.

Beamish pulled his mule to a halt then and taking cigaret papers and tobacco from his pocket, deftly rolled himself a smoke, lighted it and puffed lazily. He seemed quite unconscious of the warrior who stood near by scowling murderously. But as he picked up the reins, ready to ride on, Beamish let the bag of tobacco slip from his fingers to the ground.

"*Hi, wena!*" he called sharply. "Pick that up and give it to me."

The warrior—he had already stooped to confiscate it for himself—astonished out of his purpose, obeyed quickly and then sulkily demanded a handful of tobacco. "Give me!" he grunted and cupped his two hands.

Beamish looked at him and then over his head into the far distance. The warrior scuffled his feet uneasily.

The policeman inhaled deeply, looked thoughtfully at his finger nails, inhaled again and, tossing the half-smoked cigaret

at the warrior's feet, rode on. He did not look behind him until he had caught up with his men. Then, when he turned, he saw a number of warriors milling round the first one and the cigaret was passing from mouth to mouth.

THEY camped that night by a stagnant pool—they had found the water-hole at the nearest village guarded by warriors—and after a frugal meal sat discontentedly by the fire.

Presently Beamish, who was sitting on his blanket-roll somewhat apart from his men, chuckled happily and when the men clicked their reproach, bantered them on their solemn expressions.

"How can we be other than solemn, *inkosi?*" Corporal Tomasi asked, and coming over to where Beamish was sitting, he squatted on his haunches close by. "Would you have us jabber like those dog-apes who call M'Hoy chief? We are true Matabele—they are ——. They fight with their tongues, and when men give chase, run to hide in their hill caves; we walk where we will and give way to no man. But, because a white man whose voice is drowned by the drool of lies gives an order, we must suffer in silence while these dog-apes, these hyenas, bark filth at us. To what end, *inkosi?*

"It is an order, Tomasi. Men do not question orders but obey them."

"Say you so?" Tomasi spat reflectively. "But I do not remember that the Great Elephant, Lobenguella, ever obeyed the order of a petty headman. Then why should you listen to the voice of that one back there who is, without doubt, the spawn of a misbegotten hyena sired by a vulture?"

"He is the voice of the Great Queen," Beamish said sternly and turned his head so that Tomasi could not see the smile which was trembling about his lips.

"He is her voidance of wind, more like," Tomasi grumbled. "He said we lied—and therein praised us!—yet we spake true words. He said you lied—and so touched our honor. But what path are we to tread now, *inkosi,* now that the right way is choked up by that wait-a-minute bush of folly?"

Beamish considered before replying slowly:

"We walk quietly, Tomasi. We will be deaf and dumb and blind. If they shout filth at us we will not hear it; if they throw filth we will not return it; if they show filth to us we will not see it, neither will we see their assegais or anything the Queen's mouth said we have not seen. If they take our stores, we will give them more; if they drive away one animal we will loose two; whatever price they ask for their grain, that we will double. And always we will walk quietly, with eyes upon the ground, with hands up to our mouths."

"The *inkosi* jests?" Tomasi questioned incredulously.

"The *inkosi* does not jest," Beamish replied curtly. "That is an order."

"But, *inkosi,*" Tomasi expostulated, "they will think that we fear them. They will call us cowards. When they see us walking as you would have us walk, they will shout, 'Go softly! The soldiers of the woman chief are heavy with child!' *Au-a, inkosi,* we could not remain silent then! Our labor would be too hard!"

Beamish choked violently. The word picture Tomasi had painted was too much for him.

"You can keep silent," he said when he had recovered. "You can and must. You are a fool, Tomasi. Have you ever seen a bird play lame in order to lure a snake away from her nest? Have you never seen a crocodile float like a rotten log on the top of the water until a foolish monkey approached to drink?"

"*Tchat!* I am indeed a fool!" Tomasi said in self-condemning tones. "This, then, is only a game we play?"

"Truly!"

"And when does the game come to an end, *inkosi?*"

"When the bird flies away, Tomasi—when the monkey drinks."

"*Au-a!*" Tomasi exclaimed reproachfully. "And when will that be?"

"Who am I to prophesy the future?" Beamish said lightly.

"*Au-a!*" Tomasi exclaimed again. "*Inkosi!*"

He saluted and joined his comrades to tell them that he had just advised the *inkosi* to play a clever trick on the people of M'Hoy. But what that trick was he refused to say.

"You shall know, my children," Beamish heard him conclude in a mysterious voice, "when the bird flies away—when the monkey drinks."

They were content with that, however,

assured that a game was to be played; they could steel themselves to insults now, knowing that their *inkosi* only waited a right moment when he would turn the tables upon their insulters. Their sullen looks gave way to smiles; they asked riddles; they told simple folk-stories—and others not so simple; they burst into snatches of ribald song and, occasionally, they ground their powerful teeth together imitating, they said, the jaws of a monkey closing on its prey.

After awhile they became silent again; three of them dropped off to sleep.

"There is one other thing, *inkosi*," Corporal Tomasi said quietly. "Suppose these dogs of M'Hoy should try to treat us as they treated two of our men a little while ago? How plays the game then? Must we endure a beating—and such a beating!—in silence?"

"No!" Beamish said hotly. Then added quickly, "But, yes, Tomasi. Not to do so would spoil the game; the crocodile's jaw would close before the monkey drank. They must be given no opportunity for beating us. The child who keeps away from the water does not drown."

"True, *inkosi*. But he might get burned, or a snake might bite him, or— But, *tchat!* Your meaning is plain to me. Yet think! What can we do? The patrols must be made; we can not all sit together in one place, doing nothing."

Beamish nodded.

"That is just what must be done. No one shall go on patrol; no one shall leave the post. All shall keep together. And, because a man gets thirsty staying in one place, I will buy much beer for you all." Tomasi grinned and rubbed his belly happily. "Also," Beamish continued dryly, "for fear laziness should sap your strength, I will find plenty of work for you to do at the camp. There will be huts to build, equipment to clean, and, because I will have little else to do, I may be able to teach you to drill and use a rifle as white men do."

Tomasi chuckled.

"*Au-a!* The *inkosi* is always just. There shall be beer, he says, then adds—before a man can get drunk on desire—there shall also be work. Is it permitted that I wake the others and tell them about the beer?"

Beamish nodded.

"And the work, Tomasi. Don't forget that."

THERE followed for Trooper Beamish four weeks of hard, unremitting labor; not manual or mental labor, but the hardest labor of all—that of sitting still, doing nothing, waiting.

Actually he did many things. He drilled his men in the manual of arms until they became mechanically perfect; he taught them how to shoot—as well as that was possible without actually firing. To have done that would have been too dangerous. The reports, the smell of powder, might have been construed by the jeering warriors, who daily watched the drill, as an attack and the consquences would have been bloody.

As far as all that went, Beamish should have been satisfied. The morale of his men was excellent, their drill was a joy for ever, their equipment was spotless and he firmly believed that, should they ever be put to the test, they could do some very pretty shooting with their Martini-Henrys.

Of course they might all prove to be gun-shy; he could not tell that until they actually fired. But of this Beamish was sure—they knew how to sight correctly and they seemed absolutely devoid of nerves. One of their pet games was to put their carbines to their shoulders, align the sights on some distant object and then hold them on to the target with one hand. The man whose rifle remained steadiest for the longest time—and Tomasi was a keen judge—won. Beamish took part in this contest once and was the first to acknowledge defeat.

But all this failed to take the white man's mind off the situation at M'Hoy. His men could ignore the insults—they were playing a game—which became grosser as the days went by. But Beamish could not ignore them, not inwardly at least. He was too alive to the seriousness of the situation; he realized that the longer the impertinence of M'Hoy and his people was allowed to go unchecked, the more difficult it would be to finally administer a rebuke. He was tempted at times to quit the post and shift all responsibility on to R. N. C. Roe. But he always put that temptation on one side and would, for a time, conduct himself with even greater humility before the natives of the kraal. Whatever happened, he knew he had to play the game to the end.

He had kept rigidly to the plan of campaign he had evolved on the way up. His men had not been out on patrol and they always kept together in camp. They had ignored the insults which were constantly being hurled at them—and it seemed that the only pastime the people of the kraal had was to go down and abuse the men at the police-post. First, in the early morning, came the herd boys who halted long enough, on their way to drive goats and oxen out to graze, to give the policemen a very severe tongue-lashing, generally concluding their remarks by hurling stones; then came the women on their way to get the day's supply of water—they were particularly eloquent; followed the young men who remained with them all through the long day until the women came down for more water and the boys returned with the herd.

But Beamish's men stood it all; they even kept silent when the women shouted—as Tomasi said they would—"Walk softly! The warriors of the woman chief are heavy with child!"

One morning, when Tomasi reported that the storeroom had been broken into during the night and several bags of flour stolen, Beamish beckoned to the men who had come down from the kraal to see what he would do about it, and pointing to the open door, told them to go and help themselves. Instead of doing so they ran back to the kraal, shouting excitedly. And though, through all the days that followed, the storeroom door swung crazily upon broken hinges and creaked dismally every time a stray breeze caught it, no more stores were taken.

Several times Beamish was visited by white settlers who were greatly disturbed by the attitude of the natives. But he could give them no comfort. All he could do was to advise them to send their women into the *dorp*—he insisted they do that—be always on guard and report their fears to the R. N. C.

But the settlers had nothing but suspicions—a word spoken here; a threatening look there—and Beamish swore loudly when he visualized Roe's reception of their complaints. If only M'Hoy's people had flaunted their assegais in the faces of the settlers, as they had in his, Beamish felt that he could have forced Roe's hand. But M'Hoy was wise; he had no intention of putting too great a strain on the credulity of the R. N. C. It was all right to let his people loose in the presence of the white policeman and his black dogs; it bolstered up their fighting spirit, and was safe. But for the rest, the chief was content to wait until the time came. And so Beamish was the only white man to see assegais in the hands of the natives or had reason to suspect they owned any.

There was no doubt, however, that Beamish's attitude was puzzling the chief. Before the hearing of the case they had been over bold, continually poking their noses into things which did not concern them. But now they were, apparently, cowed. They did not leave the post to go on patrol; they were deaf to the vilest insults; they played foolish games with guns that did not speak; they utterly neglected the work of the white woman chief and—this gave M'Hoy food for much thought—they purchased great quantities of beer from his people.

And so one morning—it was after Beamish and his men had run into the largest police hut and barricaded the door against the mud-slinging attacks of the herd boys—M'Hoy decided to pay a visit to the police camp.

His coming was announced by Corporal Tomasi.

"*Inkosi,*" he cried excitedly, running into Beamish's hut, "that old jackal, M'Hoy, is here—alone! Is this the end of the game?"

Beamish shook his head. Nevertheless for a moment he had considered taking M'Hoy prisoner and holding him as hostage. But that would achieve no good end. The R. N. C. would not support him and it might be a signal for an uprising that would be given the sympathy—and perhaps active support—of other districts. For the person of a chief is sacred; to lay violent hands on one is to offend them all.

"I will go and see him, Tomasi," he said.

HE FOUND M'Hoy seated in the center of the open space which was used as a drill-ground. The chief was a thin, sour-visaged individual; his eyes squinted; his mean, wolfish face was deeply pitted with small-pox scars; his incisor teeth had been filed to sharp points; his skin—it was stretched tightly across his rotund belly, elsewhere it hung in loose, unclean folds—was of the color of dirty gray slate except where it had been daubed with some yellow

pigment. A very different M'Hoy this to the one who had appeared in court not so long ago. Then he had looked almost respectable and most civilized in a dark serge suit.

He looked up suspiciously as Beamish approached.

"Sit down, white man," M'Hoy grunted and patted the ground beside him, on his left.

Beamish squatted native fashion on his haunches; but not where M'Hoy indicated. He preferred to sit up wind; besides, he knew that the chief was practically blind in his right eye.

"We should be friends, we two," M'Hoy began abruptly.

"That is my greatest desire," Beamish replied politely.

"Umph!" M'Hoy turned and squinted at Beamish, then quickly looked away again.

"Yes," he continued, "together we could do great things."

Beamish started slightly, glad that he was on the old chief's blind side.

"My ears are open," he said meekly.

M'Hoy nodded.

"But is your mouth closed? No matter—if you speak, the fat pig—" Beamish wished that R. N. C. Roe could have heard that—"will not believe you. The others do not matter. The pig is all powerful—he himself told me so."

They were silent again for a little while and again it was M'Hoy who broke it.

"He is a fool, that white man," he said with a chuckle. "It is easy to lie to him. If he were caught in a rain storm and I told him that the sun was shining and the earth dry he would believe me. Aye! He would announce his belief so loudly that no one else could hear the pattering of the rain—And the storm clouds are gathering, white man."

Beamish picked up a handful of dust and let it trickle slowly through his fingers.

"The earth is very dry," he said presently. "No one will weep when the rains come."

"*Tchah!*" M'Hoy exclaimed impatiently. "I do not speak of that rain."

"No?" Beamish queried innocently.

"No!" M'Hoy spat through his teeth. "You know of what I speak. You are no fool. I speak of blood-rain—the blood of white men; the lightning flashes of the spear-heads of my warriors—"

"Don't forget that thunder follows lightning—the thunder of the white men's guns," Beamish interrupted dryly.

"I had not forgotten that," M'Hoy said complacently. "But this storm of which I speak will be a very brief one. Here and there, where there dwell white men in my district whose cattle I desire, there shall the spears of my warriors flash white—and then red. Before the thunder of guns can reach them, my warriors will be hidden in the caves and I shall go to the fat pig and be very sorry. I shall promise to punish the slayers—and that will be the end of it until I desire it to rain again. Is not the plan a good one?"

"And you tell it to me?" Beamish asked incredulously.

"Why not? What harm? The fat white man will not believe you should you tell him all that I have said—and he alone has power; did he not tell me so himself? Did I not observe how he spoke to you and other white men when he held court that day?"

"True!" Beamish murmured and inwardly cursed the R. N. C. who was responsible for the danger which threatened the district. "But should your warriors go out against the white men then that man's authority becomes less than nothing. Only in peace times is he supreme. In time of war there are others who take a higher power than his and to them you can not lie."

"And I have already said," M'Hoy replied confidently, "that I do not make war. Shall I be blamed if certain of my young men go on the warpath? I promise that they shall be punished and, it may be, I will ask that help be given to search them out from their hiding places. But we shall not find them! And shall I be blamed for that? Will I not have shown that I am a man of peace?"

He chuckled again and slapped his thin thighs.

Beamish made no reply for a while. He knew that M'Hoy's deductions were all wrong; knew that the chief would be held strictly to account for the actions of his warriors. He knew that at the first hostile movement of the warriors the police would take the field in strong force. M'Hoy would not last very long after that. But that wouldn't help the settlers who would already have fallen; neither would it help the people of M'Hoy who would meet death because of their chief's folly and the greater folly of a white man.

"You are wrong, M'Hoy," he said earnestly. "There will be no mercy shown to you or to your people if your warriors go out. The white men will burn your kraal—"

The chief laughed aloud at that.

"You are like a woman telling stories of ghosts to hush the wailing of her children. I know what I know. The fat white man is my friend—though I am not his—and he is all-powerful in this district. I have heard and I have seen."

Beamish was silent. He felt that to protest any further would only end in sending M'Hoy away in a huff and he was curious to know the object underlying the old heathen's visit.

"I feel sorry for you, white man," M'Hoy said presently.

"And therefore throw filth on me! *Au-a!*"

"That was for a purpose—to fill my people with courage, to show them that they had nothing to fear from the whites. But today I gave orders that you shall be treated as they would treat me—for are you not my friend?"

"Am I?" Beamish said, greatly puzzled.

"Of a truth you are. It is very plain. You have let my people insult you without rebuke, you have ignored many things, you have not patrolled the district since the fat pig called you a liar; you throw open your stores to my people and bid them help themselves; you buy much grain and beer, paying what we ask without question. It is very plain. At least, if you are not my friend you are no friend to the fat one. I am no fool. I know you are no coward—neither are those black dogs of yours—you do not fear death. And you would have died very quickly many times had you fired on us or in any way shown that you resented my people's actions. And that you would have done had you not been friendly to us."

"It may well be," Beamish said quietly, concealing his elation at the turn affairs had taken. He had not thought that his passive submission would be interpreted by the chief as an overture of friendship.

"It may well be," he repeated. "But what then?"

"Come in with me, white man," M'Hoy urged swiftly. "I need you and your black dogs. I have guns—but my warriors do not know how to use them. You shall show them how. And we have no powder. You shall procure it for us—and more guns. The reward? Ah! The reward shall be great. I know of a hill full of yellow iron. It is yours— On the other hand, there is death."

"The reward is great," Beamish muttered doubtfully. "But you ask great service. It is shame for a man to forsake his color."

"*Tchat!* Your black dogs—and others like them—have forsaken their kind and none point the finger of shame at them."

"True! I know not what to say, M'Hoy. I am of two minds—" Beamish paused, a look of indecision on his face.

The chief rose to his feet, clucking contentedly.

"It is well to leave a man with two minds alone," he said, looking down at Beamish. "I go now. Soon my young men shall bring you presents—a rock of the yellow iron, beer and grain and oxen; a leopard-skin they shall bring you, too—it was worn by a great chief. And, when you accept these presents, think of the fat pig who called you a liar."

THAT night, his feet resting on a magnificent leopard-skin, Beamish wrote a long report to R. N. C. Roe and a still longer one to Captain Murray. Strangely, at no point did one resemble the other.

These reports he handed to Corporal Tomasi of the Black Watch, who had been waiting patiently until the task was finished. Tomasi was naked save for a loin-cloth; he carried no arms.

"All will go well, *inkosi*," he said, answering the other's doubtful look of inquiry. "In the darkness of the night I will trek; no man shall see me unless I desire him to see me."

Beamish nodded, more confident now.

"I have asked the Inkosi Murray to give you long leave, Tomasi," he said. "There will be no need for you to hurry back."

"*Inkosi!*" Tomasi expressed his thanks. Then, "But I shall return, *inkosi*. I desire to see the end of the game—to see the crocodile close his jaws."

The two men exchanged an understanding grin; then Tomasi saluted, stepped out of the hut and ran swiftly through the blackness of the night.

And next morning, when the people of the kraal came down with gifts of milk and beer for the police they found them sitting

outside one of the huts, singing dolefully.

In answer to inquiries, they were told that the big bull Tomasi was sick of a fever and that songs were being sung to frighten the evil spirits away.

The answer satisfied them. Africa's black children are very unsophisticated—sometimes.

SEVEN mornings later the natives from the kraal saw Corporal Tomasi sitting in front of his hut. Save that he looked a little tired, a little thinner, the sickness had not marked him.

M'Hoy himself came down later, ostensibly to inquire into the manner of the cure, but actually to quiz Beamish about the impending arrival of Resident Native Commissioner Roe.

Beamish's start of surprize was well simulated.

"Of course you did not know," M'Hoy said affably. "But the drums spoke to me last night. They told me of the fat pig's coming. Others are with him"— M'Hoy looked sharply at Beamish— "Know you who?"

"How should I know?" Beamish asked indifferently. "Men of his own kidney no doubt."

M'Hoy shook his head.

"No—I think they are men of the police. But it is all one. You shall see how I will throw dirt into the fat pig's eyes. After that, I think, you will no longer be of two minds. And now," he leered, "I go to make my kraal and my people clean. There must be no beer pots about, no assegais, no guns—they will all be hidden in the huts and who dare enter *them?* Perhaps one or two of my men will carry knobkerries — Alas, *inkosi*—" M'Hoy's voice dropped to a hypocritical whine— "the blood lust still flows in the veins of some of my people; speak to them, Great One!" M'Hoy laughed and continued in his normal voice. "The fat pig will believe that and call you names because you do not believe. But I go now."

An hour later R. N. C. Roe, his face looking beefy-raw above his white collar, rode into camp. Beamish's face fell when he saw that Roe was unattended save for Daniel, the court interpreter, and two court messengers in charge of four heavily laden pack-mules.

"And did you ride all the way unescorted, sir," Beamish asked later when they were seated in the shade of the office hut and Roe was imbibing a cool, but strictly non-intoxicating drink. "That was very brave—but hardly wise."

"Tut, tut, my boy," Roe said genially. "There was no danger. As you said in your report, everything is very peaceful. However, Captain Murray insisted on sending an escort with me—ten men under that uncouth fellow, Sergeant Higgins. But there was no need for them—none at all—and I insisted on riding on alone this morning. My friend, M'Hoy, would feel insulted, I am sure, if I had come to him escorted by armed men. I have given them orders to remain where they are until sunset—then they will come on here. I do not think the air is healthy where they are at present encamped."

Beamish turned to hide his grin.

"You understand, don't you?" Roe asked sharply.

"Oh perfectly, sir," Beamish hastened to assure him. He knew that the R. N. C. would sleep better if he knew the police troopers were on hand to protect him should his black brothers get out of hand. "Shall I order your men to unpack your equipment in the guest hut?"

Roe shivered. Huts suggested snakes in the roof, poisonous spiders in the cracks of the mud walls.

"No, thanks," he said hastily. "Just instruct *your* men to pitch my tent there." He pointed to a level space about one or two hundred yards to the right of the police camp and nearer the river. Beamish drummed his fingers happily on his knee. The site could not have been better chosen had he selected it himself.

He laughed softly.

"Well?" queried Percival Roe.

"I was just laughing at myself, sir, for being such a fool as to have taken that case to you."

"That's all right, Beamish," Roe said condescendingly. "We all make our mistakes. Even I," he smiled, "have been known to err in judgment once or twice. But never in policies dealing with natives. And your report shows me that you have seen the error of your ways—so we will forget the rest."

"Thank you, sir," Beamish said effusively. Then, "I hope you won't think it

necessary to say anything to M'Hoy about that report, sir? You see it will look to the chief like telling tales out of school."

"Um!" Roe stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I'm not so sure that I approve of that. But—er—um! Very well, then for your sake I will not mention your name. I will just say, if the occasion presents itself, that a little bird whispered to me that there were some men in the kraal who had not paid their dog tax."

"That will be splendid, sir. If you say just that M'Hoy will credit you with supernatural powers."

Roe nodded ponderously.

"That is to be regretted," he said. "I don't like doing anything likely to foster their heathen superstitions. Still, it will not harm them to think that I am possessed with double sight. So, for your sake, I will do as you ask. I feel that I owe it to you. Your report encouraged me immensely; it is a strong proof that my administration of this district is a wise one. When I showed your report to Captain Murray, he was amazed; it left him without a leg to stand on. He actually no longer insisted on my having an escort. But I gave in to him there; one doesn't like to hit a man when he is down.

"And now, Trooper Beamish, I think I will go and pay my respects to M'Hoy. There is no need for you to attend me."

He rose, Beamish assisting him, hesitated a moment before adding,

"If I am not back before sundown it might be well for several of the men to come up for me, act as escort, you know. It would increase my prestige, you know, in the eyes of these good, simple souls. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir."

Beamish saluted and stood watching Roe, accompanied by Daniel and the two court messengers, walk slowly up the hill to the kraal.

As soon as they had passed out of sight he whooped loudly, turned a few handsprings and then he gave the Black Watch the final and explicit instructions which would insure the jaws of the crocodile closing firmly upon the monkey.

They laughed happily and later, as they were unpacking the cumbersome baggage of R. N. C. Roe, they made slow progress because every so often one of them would be seized by a fit of uncontrollable laughter and the others had to stop work to laugh with him.

THE Reverend Percy, with his three attendants, returned to the police-post just before sundown.

He had found the entertainment, he said, which M'Hoy had prepared for him very fatiguing. Such long speeches, such singing, such dancing and so much food.

Beamish gathered that it reminded the R. N. C. of a colossal Sunday school treat at home—food, laughter, singing and the playing of happy, innocent games—such innocent games. Beamish further gathered that the Reverend Percy had given a very wonderful speech and had spoken, *en passant*, of the people's new friend—one Trooper Beamish of the police. He had forgotten to say anything about the dog tax. Rather, he had not forgotten but thought that it would have been very undiplomatic to mention such matters at such a jovial occasion. Tomorrow, perhaps—but not today; not when they were playing happy, innocent games. For the rest, he, the R. N. C. was very tired—tired but happy, Trooper Beamish. He thought he would turn in. He was surprized that his escort had not yet arrived, but there was no danger—of course there was no danger.

"Good night, trooper!" he said.

"Good night, sir," said Beamish.

The R. N. C. entered his tent, the three natives entered also, the flap was closed.

"Well I'm ——," said Trooper Beamish as he walked back to the police huts, there to wait for darkness and Sergeant Higgins to come. To wait still longer—for the rising of the moon.

THE rising of a full moon saw no cessation in the feasting at the kraal of M'Hoy, only now it in no way resembled a Sunday school treat. Beer drinking had taken the place of eating; the songs, the dances and games were no longer innocent. But the drums were silent. And there M'Hoy showed his wisdom. Had not the R. N. C. timidly expressed the hope that his dear friends would not consider it necessary to beat them in his honor?

But for the rest, M'Hoy had no care. He felt that his people deserved this relaxation after the long afternoon of good

behavior. As long as they did not sing and shout too loud—

M'Hoy drained the pot of beer one of his wives handed to him, drank a little from another one and then passed it to one of his gray-bearded counselors.

"The game goes well," he said happily. "All white men are fools; the fat pig, because he is what he is; the others because they have set him in authority over them."

"And you are very wise," the gray-beards replied dutifully.

"True," M'Hoy agreed complacently. "Though it is no great matter to throw dust in the eyes of fools."

He snatched the pot greedily away from one of the gray-beards and put it to his lips.

But before he could drink, a well-aimed mess of dripping mud hit against the gourd with such force that it flew from his hands, its contents splashing all over him.

He sprang to his feet, screaming with rage.

"What dog did that?"

But only a few near him heard or were aware that anything was wrong.

"What—" he got no further. An overripe egg caught him full in the face, other filth followed and at the same time there was a commotion among the dancers. Men accused each other of throwing filth; women cursed and clawed each other.

And then above the uproar sounded mocking laughter; a deep voice bellowed:

"Go to the river and wash, you stinking hyenas. You pollute the air."

Some warriors rushed toward the shadows from whence they judged the voice came. They found the shadows empty but showers of small pebbles pattered on their backs and another voice called from behind them—

"What? Are you afraid of the wind. We return to you what you gave."

Other voices shouted abuse; well-chosen abuse which made the ears of M'Hoy's people tingle with shame, drove them fighting mad. There was bitter venom in the insults which Beamish and his men hurled at the people of M'Hoy; they were returning with interest the insults they had suffered in silence. And as they played hide-and-seek in the shadows about the huts, they plastered the warriors with all manner of filth.

The women ran shrieking to their huts; the warriors ran aimlessly back and forth, lacking a directing hand.

M'Hoy could not assist them. He, shielded by his women, was endeavoring to wash the filth from his face—using good beer for that purpose.

Just as he had succeeded in cleansing himself a warrior cried:

"We are attacked! To arms."

The warriors ran to their huts and M'Hoy was alone, save that at the far end of the clearing was the white policeman and the men of the Black Watch.

They were, he saw—and fear was in his heart—all armed. Their movements were slow, menacing. He did not perceive—the moon's rays were deceptive and he had drunk heavily—that they were marching backward, away from the circle of huts.

He looked helplessly about him, was about to make an appeal for mercy, then saw that the doorways of the huts were darkened by the forms of his warriors; they had armed themselves and now waited his commands.

He grinned. The white man and his black dogs were caught in a trap; there would be a killing; some of his warriors would die—all the police would die. But his hands would be clean to show the fat pig. The fault would not be his. They were the aggressors—sneaking into the kraal at night when all slept!

M'Hoy grinned again; then—

"*Bulala!* Kill!" he shouted and, hurling himself to the ground, squirmed into his hut.

At the cry which brought the warriors leaping from their huts, brandishing assegais, yelling threats, Beamish and his men fled in panic-stricken haste from the kraal. The warriors, shouting exultantly, gave chase.

As they ran, Beamish's men fired blindly into the air. The shots were answered by mocking laughter and threats of torture to come. An assegai whizzed by the head of Beamish. He leaped into the air, sprinted faster and ran full tilt into the tent of R. N. C. Roe.

"What is it, what is it?" that man called fearfully.

"Quick, sir!" Beamish panted. "The natives are on the war-path."

The men of the Black Watch, as cool as if they were on the drill-ground, lined up before the tent, between it and the advancing warriors.

At a command from Beamish they fired a volley, aiming at the ground just in front

of the warriors. The vicious spurts of dust, the whine of bullets, had the desired effect; the warriors scattered, sought cover and advanced slowly, creeping on their bellies.

The flap of the tent was torn open and a massive form—which was the Reverend Percy—clad in a long white night-gown emerged. Daniel and the two court messengers followed close behind. These last three looked once at the advancing warriors and then ran shrieking toward the river.

"Perhaps if you spoke to them, sir," Beamish despairingly indicated the warriors.

But Roe had caught the twinkle of assegai heads.

"They are armed!" he gasped. "Oh! my God! What shall I do?"

He looked wildly about him.

"Make for the river, sir. Once across that, maybe we can hold them."

Roe hesitated no longer. Holding up his night-gown, he ran staggeringly, moaning loudly, toward the river.

Beamish and his men retreated slowly, firing whenever a warrior got over-bold. When a quick glance over his shoulder showed him that Roe had almost reached the bank of the river he shouted an order to his men.

They fired a volley and, turning, ran swiftly to the river, overtaking the R. N. C. and carrying him along with them, over the bank into the cold water below.

And so Percival Roe did not see four mounted men—that uncouth fellow, Sergeant Higgins, was one of them—urge their mounts up the steep bank and charge madly into the warriors; did not see three other troopers charge in from the left and three others from the right; did not see Trooper Beamish and his men—all snapping their jaws in imitation of a crocodile—returning to the attack, cheering wildly.

And Beamish kept him cowering in the water long after the warriors had surrendered. And that they had done at almost the first moment of the troopers' mad charge. How were they to know that the white force was so small? Besides, the night was cold and their chase of Beamish had worked off the effects of the beer they had drunk.

"I shall never forget how brave you were tonight, Trooper Beamish," Roe said as that man escorted him to his tent. He was a pitiful looking object; his night-gown, plastered with mud, clung ungracefully to his ungraceful body and his hair hung down limply over his forehead. His teeth chattered like castanets.

"Yes, sir," said Trooper Beamish. "But I think you'd better give yourself a rub-down and get to bed. Night-bathing sometimes brings on malaria."

Roe looked doubtfully at the warriors who were sitting close by; mounted troopers kept guard over them.

"There is—er—" Roe's voice was very meek— "nothing to fear from them now, Trooper Beamish?"

"No, sir," Beamish answered with a grin. "Your dear black brothers are feeling very suppressed." And with that Beamish ran swiftly away.

Roe watched him join Sergeant Higgins, saw the two men exchange good-humored blows, heard their uproarious laughter and then, shaking his head doubtfully, muttering,

"What a fool I've been. What a fool I am," he turned and entered his tent.

ON THE following morning Captain Murray, heading a strong force of police and volunteers, rode into camp. He at once assumed full charge and, after a thorough search of the kraal had disclosed many more assegais besides a dozen antiquated guns, insisted that R. N. C Roe hold court.

"I'd much rather not," Roe said mildly. "You see I'm thinking of resigning and—"

"Until your resignation has taken effect, sir," Murray answered sternly, "you have a duty to perform. Through your stupid policy, M'Hoy has been flirting with open rebellion. You have ignored all the warnings men in a position to know have given you; you have called my men liars and ridiculed them before the natives. And now, sir, you shall sit in judgment on the men whom, by your conduct, you have encouraged to act as they have."

Percival Roe heard a great deal that was good for his soul during the ensuing trial of M'Hoy. He learned for the first time that wily old heathen's real opinion of him; learned how nearly his administration had brought about the massacre of settlers and learned, finally, how M'Hoy's hand had been forced, the danger averted, by a clever trick.

When the evidence was all in, he rose from his chair and said brokenly, addressing Captain Murray:

"I can not pass judgment. My sin is greater than theirs. I commit them all for trial before the Chief Native Commissioner."

Then, covering his face with his hands, he walked slowly away.

"JUST the same, Beamish," Captain Murray said later, "I'm glad I didn't know what you were up to. I'd never have let you go through with it. It was—dangerous."

Beamish nodded.

"I know, sir. But the worst that could have happened, if they had wiped us out before Higgins' men got to work, that would have been the end of M'Hoy's plans; that would have been better than waiting—as we would have had to wait—until M'Hoy's warriors attacked the settlers. As it was, no one was seriously hurt—a few flesh wounds, that's all—and you're free to search all the other kraals in the district for arms. M'Hoy's power is broken and—" he chuckled softly—"thanks to M'Hoy's impertinence, R. N. C. Roe has had a little sense knocked into him."

"I wonder," Captain Murray said doubtfully. He knew the breed.

"CORONADO'S TURK"

by Eugene Cunningham

FRANCISCO CORONADO found himself, in 1541, with an expedition both large and splendidly-equipped for that day, in possession of the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola, but having accomplished nothing in the way of getting rich. But if Zuñi-Cibola had proved to be only native pueblos, lacking wealth, Coronado hoped that farther on might be found a richer land. To Zuñi-Cibola now came Indians from the village of Cicuyé, or Pecos (somewhere between Algodones and Albuquerque). They were buffalo-hunters as the Zuñi were not.

Coronado sent his lieutenant Alvarado to Pecos with the returning Cicuyés and so the Spanish met an odd figure, a prisoner or wanderer from his own land. Alvarado thought him a Turk, but he was only an Indian from the Mississippi Valley separated from his own tribe. They asked him about the country to the east and later complained that he had deceived them, claiming it to be thickly-populated, rich in gold. Houses there were of stone and much larger than those of Pecos. It is impossible to guess how much of the trouble "*el Turco*" caused the Spanish was due to wilful lying and how much to the difficulty of making himself understood and understanding what they asked him. Doubtless something of both.

He may have been a shrewd Indian. Exiled in New Mexico, desiring to return to his country, he may have felt that with a Spanish escort the journey home could be accomplished safely. At Tiguex, when Coronado joined Alvarado, the "Turk" complained that a gold armband of his was held by the Pecos. Alvarado seized their cacique after some argument on the subject and there followed a general uprising of the Pecos and their allies, the Tiguas.

In May, 1541, Coronado, disgusted with barren New Mexico, excited by the "Turk's" tales of a river two leagues wide containing fish the size of a man, bearing canoes with forty paddlers; of great stone houses and vessels of silver and gold, set out for the east, the "Turk" guiding them to "Quivira." A young "Quivira" Indian was found to share with the "Turk" the duty of guide. He said that gold was in his country, but not in the quantities described by the "Turk."

Coronado sent back all but 29 riders to Pecos and himself marched on guided by the Teyas. Directly north they went for thirty days and on August 21, 1541, arrived at "Quivira"—probably in central Kansas, about a hundred miles north of the Arkansas River.

There was no "city"; it was the camp of a tribe, a savage, nomadic people having neither fixed abode nor gold. The Spanish were furious at the "Turk." They said that he confessed that the Pueblo Indians had engaged him to lure the Spaniards into the plains, to perish there. When he tried to rouse the Quiviras against Coronado he was hanged.

The Profaned Shovel

by Edmund M. Littell

HEAT? The Sahara Desert is a mountain glen compared to the blast from the open hearth furnaces of Midwest Steel. Labor? The gigantic accomplishments of Hercules were child's play in the sand beside the toil of those slaves who shovel tons of the earth's crust into those caverns of leaping flame. But Ole Olson ate it up. Other men fought the heat; he played with it. Other men snarled as they charged into the blast from open furnace doors, cursed as they hurled their shovel-loads at the eighty-foot lake of molten lava; he smiled. Other men worked on the open hearth for money; he worked there because he loved it.

A Swede on an open hearth! When he had applied—in perfect English—for a job, big Jock Campbell, the huge man who as superintendent shrewdly mixed men and fires to produce tonnage, looked him over scepticically. Ole was no pigmy himself. More than six feet tall. But his shock of taffy-colored hair, his fair skin with pink cheeks, his well-dressed appearance—Jock Campbell shook his head doubtfully. But men were hard to get. He ran a big hand through his stiff gray hair—and stuck him in the cinder pit. Only one way to find out about a man—make him third helper. The meanest job in a steel plant, and canny old Jock knew it. Men either quit the cinder pit before the day is out, quit and never ask for their time, or stick. Ole Olson stuck. With a smile. Down on to the smoking pile of slag went Ole, two-inch soles on his shoes and a pick and shovel in his hands, and broke out the hot cinder as if he were digging in a rose garden.

"He'll crack," said the interested watchers. "He'll tear out of there like a rabbit before the day's over. Get himself a job where he belongs—back of a ribbon counter. He's too pretty."

Red Sullivan begged to differ. Red Sullivan was first helper and boss of No. 5 furnace to which Ole had been assigned. A lean, scrawny man, rendered down to skin and bone by the fires he served, with hair and eyes the color of a hot brick. He shook his head slowly, looked hard at Bull Dard and passed his opinion.

"Pretty or not, that guy acts like a steelman. You birds lay off him till he gets the splash-back. Dollars to doughnuts he takes it like a man."

A raucous laugh from Bull Dard.

"I'll take that. Three doughnuts that he flops. An' if he don't—"

Bull Dard was first helper on No. 6; a heavy-paunched giant of a man who seemed to grow fat on his labor; a sullen man who could melt steel to perfection, but who in other ways was not so commendable. Red knew what that pause meant, but only tossed a hot-eyed look of warning. Time enough to go farther after the splash-back.

Ole cleaned out the cinder pit. He did it thoroughly, did it time after time. He hardly waited for the ladle to be lifted out of the pit, barely gave the slag time to blacken, before he was down there cleaning out the thirty-foot nest that had been soiled by the spewing pot when its hundred tons of steel

"The Profaned Shovel," copyright, 1925, by Edmund M. Littell.

boiled over. Dirty, sweating, inhaling the sulfur fumes, he slogged that man-made lava and smiled. Grimy with dust that rose and settled on his sweat-soaked clothes, he somehow always looked clean. Maybe it was his fair hair and his white teeth. He was one of the few men that left the plant carefully washed and neatly clothed; almost the only man in the three thousand workers who went home bright-eyed. In addition to losing his three doughnuts, Bull had that cleanliness as an excuse for sneers.

Red and Jock agreed that a week was plenty long enough to work him in the cinder pit. If he was any good at all, Red maintained, he ought to be second helping. So he passed the word around that the splash-back test was about to be applied, then went out on to the steel balcony near the tapping spout.

"Hey, Ole!" he shouted down to where the third helper was shoveling out the last bit of cinder twenty feet below. "Come up here!" Ole smiled and climbed the steep flight of stairs. "Want a chance on the chargin' floor? Goin' to add some ferro."

"Sure," said Ole, and followed his boss through the narrow aisleway between heat-soaked furnaces 4 and 5.

The boulevard-wide charging floor lay shadowy beneath its brooding roof, its inner side walled by the ten long furnaces that stretched a quarter of a mile on either side, its outer wall open for light and air. Close in front of the furnaces lay the narrow gauge tracks; behind them the twenty-foot spread of the charging machine rails. Littering the steel-plated floor were piles of dolomite, feldspar, ferro, and other steel-making materials. The three peep-hole eyes of the furnace glittered malevolently as if some ribald joke were about to be cracked.

As far away from its heat as they could get, near the outer edge of the charging floor, a group of men lounged about lazily. If it were not for the rest periods that came occasionally during the day there would be no steel made; no man could stand the gaff without those times for relaxation. Now they were gathered for entertainment—those who could leave their furnaces—sprawling on a high-backed wooden bench, black and shiny from contact with sweating backs. Others sat on the edge of a water tank that served as bathtub for the furnace crew. All were occupied with their own affairs; no one noticed the arrival of the fair-skinned neophyte and his preparations to charge ferro. No one but Bull Dard, who measured the candidate with glowering eyes.

Red handed Ole a shovel.

"We're addin' five hundred pounds o' ferro," he explained, indicating a pile of ferro-manganese that lay heaped in the center of the floor.

Fist-size chunks of cast-iron, heavy and coarse-grained, their broken edges glittered in the blare of light as Red raised the three furnace doors and dispersed the gloom. Ole rolled up his shirt sleeves.

"How?" he asked.

"Start at the end door. One load in each door till it's all charged. Got a pair of glasses?"

Ole shook his head. A third helper had little need for eye protection; all he needed was a gas mask.

"Gimme a pair o' glasses, one o' you," demanded Red of the loafing crowd, and at least five pair were offered. Blue eyes covered by bluer lenses, Ole set to work. Then it was that the assumed indifference of the gathered men was dropped. All eyes were turned on the innocent tyro.

OLE scooped up a load of the heavy ferro and stepped up to an open door. Inside the furnace an eighty foot lake of molten steel bubbled quietly, its surface scum undulating gently as if some giant salamander stirred restlessly below. Great fronds of flame soared across it with the gentle sigh of a spring breeze, while the breath of a thousand Saharas blasted dry his wet shirt. He swung his shovel back, then forward, with a sweep of easy strength, and the load sailed away to drop into the slag blanket and disappear. Ole proved conclusively that he was a beginner by standing fast and watching it. But the length of his inactivity was short.

Suddenly he dropped his shovel. His hands flew to his shirt front, pawing, slapping, brushing. Drops of the molten slag had splashed back on him, kicking back along the same course taken by the flying ferro. They settled on his shirt, ate their way through and nestled lovingly against his skin just above his belt. Every man in the silent audience knew all about it. Many of those stomachs itched sympathetically as

they watched Ole's slapping hands. What happened from here on was what interested them.

Ole shook himself like a drenched dog. He brushed and slapped furiously, he leaned far over until his white hair touched the floor, but those searing drops of lava stuck. No word of advice was offered—that was part of the test. Red and his other helper plugged along, apparently unconscious of Ole's struggle. After a second or two of frantic effort, Ole fled away from the furnace. Leaping the piles of stuff that cluttered the floor, jumping across the tracks, he tore through the crowd of watchers, who scattered before him. Without a moment's hesitation, he flung himself bodily into the water tank. The fire that ate his belly was extinguished. Still the audience watched silently, and Red plugged away at his furnace.

Ole climbed out of the tank. He shook his head, loosened his belt and carefully pulled his chafing trousers away from the burned place. He raised his blue glasses, the better to see the unconcerned labor of Red, and watched him for a moment. Then he smiled, a white-toothed grin of understanding, crossed the floor and picked up his shovel, and fell in line. Scooping up a load of ferro, he walked quickly up to the door, his shovel drawn back for tossing. Without breaking his stride he passed before the door, heaving as he went, then ducked quickly as though expecting a kick from behind. His hurried steps carried him back to the pile, where he scooped again and returned to the furnace.

Ole Olson had passed! The test of the splash-back had uncovered a scar-bellied steel-man! The watching men were silent no longer; they laughed and chatted. And when the last load of ferro had been charged, the last door closed so that only a gleam of pleasure sparkled through each peep-hole eye, they welcomed Ole into their circle. With claps upon his broad and sturdy back, with clasps of hands and brotherly solicitations, they awarded him the accolade of the open-hearth shovel.

Red produced a bright and shining instrument, longer and narrower than a scoop, and handed it to Ole. Its edge hardened, its handle carefully fashioned, its shaft stout, it was the operating instrument with which an open-hearth man expresses himself.

"Here's hopin' you can learn to handle it well," said Red. "An' that it'll make you a first helper as quick as you deserve."

Ole released one hand from its grip on his loosened trousers and took it. The significance of the shovel was unknown to him, but the informal impressiveness affected him. He blushed.

"Hey, you slag-jumpin' steel-hounds, what is this—a tea party?" It was the roar of Jock Campbell, the huge boss of them all, as he horned into the crowd. "Do yer loafin' in front o' yer own furnaces! Mike, yer heat's ready to tap! Clear, ye bums, we're makin' steel today!"

The crowd scattered, laughing, for they knew that Jock understood the purpose of their meeting. Jock's bark was always worse than his bite—unless there was something to bite on, and this time he had not appeared until the show was concluded. A most successful initiation. Many men quit after the splash-back; few of those who passed ever finished out the day. Ole Olson would be a steel-man! So thought all of them but Bull Dard. While Red and Jock were busy conferring at one side and the men scattered to their furnaces, he approached Ole. With glittering eyes he looked the big man up and down. His club fingers felt the shoulders and arms of the initiate as a butcher would inspect an ox intended for slaughter. Ole stood fast, smiling.

"He's a purty boy," mumbled Bull, "but he hurt his tummy. Papa fix it," and his hairy open hand fetched Ole a slap just above the belt. Ole bowed. Not in deference, but to remove his tender belly from the impact. He was too slow. The palm struck fairly, and Ole's teeth bared with the pain of broken blisters. Bull stood tensely, prepared for the inevitable result of his action, but before a fitting retort came from Ole, Bull was twirled about by a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"On yer way, ye black-hearted scut," bellowed Jock. "An' keep yer eyes on yer furnace! Any more shenanigans from you an' I'll run ye out!"

Bull slouched away, growling.

"Ye did it well, lad," Jock went on, addressing himself in modified voice to Ole. "I'm thinkin' ye'll be a steel-man some day. Ye'll be second helper from now on. Tend yer fires, fight ye no fights, an' ye'll be a melter soon or I miss my guess."

Ole smiled.

"T'd like to stay on Red's furnace, sir."

"Red's already asked fer ye. Fix up them blisters an' go to work," and Jock was off on his other manifold affairs.

"Come here," called Red from the first aid cabinet where he had salve and bandages ready. "Get some grease on them things. Hurt bad?"

"Bad enough." Ole pulled up his shirt and presented the broken blisters for treatment. "Are there any more stunts like that?"

"No, that's all—'cept the spark-shower you get once in a while. Every steel-makin' slag-ducker on this floor's got a white belt on his belly. Look." Red showed his own brand, white scars drawing a line like a belt across him. "All you got to do now is fight steel the rest o' your life. Soft job, steel makin'!" He went over to the water valve lever and changed the drafts on the furnace. "An' keep an eye on Bull. He's a good first helper, but he's lookin' for trouble all the time."

Ole shrugged.

"We'll get along, I guess. He's just playful."

Red turned a puzzled glance on his new second helper. That was not exactly the remark he expected from him, but he covered his surprize in an assumption of busyness.

Thus did Ole Olson, descendant of water-loving men, become a slave to the gigantic lamp of steel. Until his blisters healed Red was easy on him, made him rest between jobs on No. 5 and refused to let him join in the labor exchange with Nos. 4 and 6 when bottom-making time came. To Bull Dard, in the privacy of a conference beside the tapping spout of Bull's furnace, Red passed a quiet tip.

"You lay off Ole till he gets healed up, see?" he said. "If I catch you lookin' cross-eyed at him I'll bend a rabblin' bar over yer head, get me?"

"Who's botherin' yer white-haired baby?" growled Bull.

"No one—yet," snapped Red, "but there's no tellin' when it'll start, an' there's one black-haired steel man that'll get in trouble if he fools around my crew!"

"Aw, go back an' wet-nurse yer furnace—an' yer second helper," sneered Bull. "He bowed to me when I slapped his blisters."

"You heard what I said!" Red replied. "An' I won't tell you again. When Ole Olson gets well enough to take, you can play with him. He won't be a real steel-man till he beats you up, but you lay off him till he does a turn on your furnace."

So saying, Red left his surly neighbor to his own devices.

DURING the next few days Ole sat with Red on the high-backed wooden bench and asked questions while he scraped down his shovel. That was the first thing he learned: that to the man who lives with a shovel in his hand that tool must become an integral part of him. The handgrip must fit without wrinkling the right palm, the shaft must be glass smooth for the slide of the left. And when not in use or being scraped, it must be carefully locked away lest some desecrating hand mar its perfection. Clothes might be burned, hide might be blistered, but an open hearth man's shovel must be guarded as precious. Scrape, scrape, scrape; talk, talk, talk. It was during those times that Red learned things as well. Ole knew the theory of steel-making; had studied it out himself at night after working at such jobs as an immigrant is compelled to take. He might fumble a bit in the practical work, but never twice in the same place, and his questions were directed by a hungry intelligence. He knew what he wanted and went after it. Red knew that he would be a steel-man in a million. He hoped that Bull Dard would shift his playfulness to some other man.

"Say, I don't like the idea of loafing here while you're making bottom on the other furnaces," said Ole one day. "Better let me in on it; my blisters are all right now."

"Sure? Well, No. 6'll be needing some attention pretty quick; might as well come along."

Red sighed, for it might mean a number of things.

Bull's eyes lighted up as he welcomed his neighbors.

"How's the blisters, pretty boy," he hailed Ole.

"All healed up," said Ole with a white-toothed smile. "Didn't you know my name is Ole Olson?"

"So I heard, but I don't like yer name any better'n yer looks. Ya oughta be back of a ribbon counter."

Ole's smile stiffened.

"I prefer steel-making," said he. "Are you ready to make bottom?"

Bull winked slowly at Red, turned on his heel with a shrug of heavy shoulders and opened his furnace doors.

Making bottom is no morning stroll through a field of daisies. A yawning empty furnace, just relieved of its hundred tons of steel soup, glowing white with the two thousand degrees of heat that soaks it from floor to ceiling. A dazzling heat like that of an incandescent lamp. Three open doors, yawning for food. Great pock-marks in the shallow oval pan of a bottom—pits in the dolomite lining eaten out by the steel that has just plunged down into the ladle set on the opposite side.

A great pile of dolomite waiting on the floor between the charging machine tracks. White, chalk-like pebbles, spawling dust. Transfer that pile of dolomite—magnesia and limestone—a shovelful at a time into the yawning furnace until those pock-marks are filled. Scoop, throw; back and forth, into the heat and out. Hands grow stiff, sweat pours down until shoes are filled. No wonder the steel-man pets his shovel. No wonder he curses his job. Some men, even after they pass the splash-back, never finish making their first bottom. Some of them it turns stringy and lean with hollow, red-rimmed eyes like Red. Others it does not mar on the surface, but makes sullen, like Bull. Rarely does it produce men like Ole. Sweating rivers but never thinning; facing the fires of hell but remaining as serene as heaven, Ole thrived on it. With his blue glasses far out on his nose so he could look around then when turned away from the furnace and through them when feeding it, his gait never faltered. Even the heat-calloused souls of the men who worked there felt a thrill of admiration at the sight of him. Not so Bull Dard.

When the last shovelful of dolomite had been hurled with the accuracy of sharp-shooters into the tub-sized pock-marks, and the last door was closed, Bull expressed his appreciation in his own peculiar way. Hot-eyed, worn by the gruelling labor, he picked up a double handful of powdered dolomite and approached Ole.

"You're the dolomite-slingin' kid," said he, and threw the flour on Ole's head. "Any time you want some extra chores to do, come on over."

With a rasping laugh he turned his back on Ole, leaving him to express himself as he saw fit. To the great surprize of Red and the disgust of Bull, Ole simply walked to his water tank and washed the stuff off.

Red could not stand it.

"Why don't you knock his head off?" he demanded furiously.

Ole shook the water out of his hair and smiled. "Oh, it's just his way," said he. "I'm big enough to take it. If he wasn't playing with me, he'd be after some one else."

Then it was Red's turn to shake his head, mystified. What Ole said was perfectly true; Bull simply had to be plaguing some one. But no man in the world could be a man and stand for it, even if he got beat up in the process. Was this perfect steel-man, this young jewel of the open hearth floor, flawed by a—a yellow streak? Before an hour had passed every one on the long floor, from Jock Campbell down to Runt Cazak the messenger boy, knew and wondered.

Jock drew Red aside under the guise of inspecting the furnace.

"Bull at it again?" he asked. "He's just got to be houndin' somebody, ain't he?"

Red looked across the floor at Ole, who was putting the last loving polish to his shovel handle.

"He'd better lay off Ole," said he tensely, "or I'll take a hand myself!"

Jock shook his head.

"Just tend yer fires and leave the boys alone," he warned. "When the time comes for it to be settled, it'll take care of itself. Just you keep tellin' Ole everything ye know."

"Tell him? Why he pumps me till I'm dry," bragged Red. "He'll be takin' my job away from me next."

"No danger," laughed Jock. "An' we can do with a good first helper any time."

Every one agreed that of the two men, Bull was the one that suffered most. Bull was accustomed to getting some sort of a kick out of his persecutions. It was no fun to wipe your feet on a man and have him smile. Bull wanted a fight; had to have one once in a while in order to digest his meals correctly. But he could never get Ole heated up. If Bull had not been such a good first helper, Jock would have fired him long ago. But good men are not picked up on every street corner, so Jock merely warned him.

"I ain't doin' nothin'," mumbled Bull

like a disgruntled school boy. "Just havin' a little fun."

"That's all right, too, but when yer fun begins to interfere with steel, yer steppin' on my toes. An' ye ain't forgot how ye stepped on 'em once."

"Who's interferin' with any steel?" protested Bull. "Ain't the heats comin' down right? I'll be breakin' my furnace record this month."

"As long as it's furnace records an' not men ye're breakin', more power to ye. But the minute yer foolin' hurts one o' the men, get yer time before I get hold o' ye," and Jock turned away in his endless pursuit of the ability to be in three places at once beneath the fifteen-acre roof.

He ignored the wordless grumble that came from Bull, for he knew when to stop talking. That accounted for the tonnage records he made in the great plant.

DAY after day they slogged away at steel. They worked like galley slaves; they rested like trail-weary dogs. All but Ole. He played with his fires, was as fresh at night as he was in the morning. The sight of his bare torso, wet with sweat and glistening in the glow from open furnace doors, grew to be one of the shows of the mill. Whenever visitors came to the main office with influence enough to get them out into the plant, Jock's phone always rang with an inquiry as to what Ole was doing.

If he was making bottom, the visitors were led to where he worked, and invariably stopped without being told to watch him. The graceful ease of his movements made the work seem play. His powerful shoulders and tapering arms, haloed by the incandescence of the furnace and surmounted by the hair that seemed floating flame, were silk-like in their action; his shovel described its sweeps through the air as though it were a brush in the hands of an artist. It was a joy to behold.

If the information came that a heat was being tapped, the visitors were conducted to a narrow, shelf-like platform that hung on the wall ten feet above the ground on the opposite side of the casting-floor. From there they saw the cataract of molten steel plunge down the tapping spout and cascade into the ladle. Flame and smoke soared in billows to the high roof; sparks showered. And there, outlined in the gigantic spotlight of the flame, the living spirit of fire, stood Ole. Close to the tapping spout, on the second-story platform from which he could look down into the pot of hell and watch his river of fire, he smiled. Tossed into the tumbling stream fifty-pound sacks of coal dust as though they were bags of popcorn. Heaved manganese with his personal shovel as if it were sawdust. And all the time in selfless devotion to the fire, unconscious of the spectacle he made.

That such a man should ignore Bull's persecutions was more than the men could stand. Was there none of the fires of hell in him? Why didn't he do something besides smile? It only served to increase Bull's temper; make his attacks more personal and insulting.

One day when they had finished making bottom, Bull turned on him with a snarl.

"I don't like yer looks. Ye're too white—hair, skin, everything."

"That's the way I was made," smiled Ole, his hands at his sides, unclenched, and no trace of anger in his voice.

"Maybe I can change 'em," said Bull. He picked up a bucketful of water thickened with clay that had been used to reline the tapping spout. Swoosh! he spread the yellowish mess on Ole, covering him from head to foot. "That's more yer color," he said, and set himself hopefully. Ole simply turned on his heel and retired to his water-tank where he washed off the mess!

"Fer the love of manhood, why don't you murder that guy?" cried Red. "If you can't do it with your hands, take a shovel!"

"Why?" asked Ole. "He isn't hurting me, he's only playing. He's not hurting me—he can't hurt these clothes. Let him enjoy himself. He's a good steel-man."

"I'll do it myself, then," sputtered Red.

"No, never mind," said Ole, and reached into his locker for a bit of glass with which he scraped off a microscopic rough spot on his shovel handle. "Why should you fight when there's nothing to be mad about?" His blue eyes were untroubled as he tucked his tool away.

It was too much for Red; he could only groan aloud. Couldn't Ole see that something was bound to happen if his supine toleration didn't stiffen into resistance? Within an hour the whole open hearth would hear about this last insult. Already they were whispering, taking sides. Some defended Ole, most of them sneered. If he

didn't show some gumption the makings of the best steel-man that ever tapped an open hearth would be run off the place. What would make him mad? Red discovered late that afternoon.

They were making bottom on Bull's furnace, the third one that day. A crowd of visitors had appeared, evidently important ones, for the Old Man was with them. Jock Campbell, too, his large head towering over them. All eyes were focussed on Ole. Even Jock, who had been watching men work furnaces all his life, stared his admiration. The strangers forgot to ask questions, stopped looking about cautiously in their absorption. The unconscious art of the viking of fire with his shovel was being likened to that of a dancer.

Back and forth they went until even the strangers felt their weariness. At last the job was done. A train of dinkey flat-cars loaded with coffin-shaped charging boxes full of scrap-iron was rolling up to the furnace on its narrow gauge tracks. From the other side the charging machine, an elephantine structure that straddled the piles of litter between its twenty-foot tracks, was grinding toward the furnace. Ole stood and rested on his shovel, its blade on the floor behind him, its handle serving as a seat. His back was toward the visitors; he was looking into the open furnace. It was not an attitude of exhaustion; more one of relaxation, though the other men were drooping listlessly. A long, hard day, with three furnaces tapped during its trying hours, was enough to try the soul of any man. Perhaps that was what caused Bull's vindictiveness to take a more personal turn.

He sneaked up behind Ole and maliciously upset the pose of relaxation by snatching away the supporting shovel. Did it in the presence of Jock and strangers. Ole lost his balance and sat down on the floor with a thump. Any other man would have come up fighting, but Ole merely smiled. He got to his feet and reached for his shovel with the gentleness of a parent protecting a child from danger. The magnanimity of the action infuriated Bull. That and his infernal weariness could have been the only reason for his utter folly. For he snatched the shovel away from Ole's reach, stuck its blade beneath the rail of the charging machine track, heaved on it once, and snapped the handle in two. The crack was heard above the noises of approaching machinery. So was the sound of Ole's surprized gasp.

Like a tiger Ole leaped for his broken shovel. He picked it up and looked at it for a split second; then, with a smile no longer on his lips, he swung a doubled fist. The smack of its impact on Bull's heavy ribs was the next audible sound. As if it were a signal, it stopped every other activity on the floor.

Bull stood solidly for a second, and a broad smile appeared on his lips. Then he crouched and charged at his white-skinned opponent. There was a tangle of flying arms and struggling bodies. Into it Jock charged with a bellow:

"Cut it out, ye scuts!"

But he might as well have charged an express train. He came flying out of the fray like a rubber ball bouncing from a wall.

"Leave 'em go," he shouted. "One o' you boys go call up the hospital! Send the doctor over here! This is goin' to be a fight!"

A circle formed about the struggling men. Furnaces were forgotten. Men came running down the floor from both sides. There in the center of a hot floor of steel plates, surrounded by piles of ferro, dolomite and spar, a battle took place that will long be remembered in the annals of Midwest Steel.

Ole stopped Bull's first rush with two of the prettiest blows ever seen on the floor. Then with a mighty blow Bull toppled Ole backward onto a ragged pile of ferro. Up he scrambled with a resilience that made his fall and rise one motion, to meet Bull's rush. His back was cut by the jagged edges of the ferro, tinted red as his blood mingled with his sweat, but only his audience knew it. He aimed a swing at Bull, striking him above the eye, and Bull staggered back.

First one was down and then the other, while the cheers and calls of the divided crowd rang among the smoky rafters of the roof. Ole's fair skin turned mottled beneath Bull's hammering blows; Bull's darker flesh did not show its bruises. After what seemed hours of conflict, Ole connected at the proper place and Bull went down sprawling. But not for good. He rolled about, clawed at the floor and got to his knees, then his feet. His hand had come in contact with the handle of his shovel, and when he rose, the familiar weapon was in his grip.

The shovel blade whistling in the air, Bull swung. That would be murder! A

gasp from the crowd. Ole ducked, and the blade whistled over his head. Before Bull could recover his balance, Ole had floored him again, and then he reached for his own broken tool. The men would have stopped it, but they were afraid. This was more than a fight; it was murder. Any man who stepped into that ring would be ruthlessly flailed down. The next swing from Bull was warded off by Ole's ringing blade. Clang! They swiped and sparks flew. Bang! and they slithered along with the noise of rapiers in the days of romance.

Wicked blades they were, sharpened by many scoops along the steel floor, attuned to each man's grip by hours of handling. Clubs with knives on their ends! A swift slash came through Ole's guard and clipped his scalp. His shoulders grew pinker in the glow from the open furnace door. A sweep of his blade slipped down Bull's handle and laid open the back of his hand. He was snarling like a mad dog; his one open eye glittered like a snake's. He raised his shovel and with a mighty blow battered down Ole's shortened weapon. Then, with blade leveled, its edge aimed at Ole's neck, he charged. The intaken breath of the audience hissed across the silence. One thrust would decapitate Ole as with an ax!

Ole saw it coming, raised his own blade to meet the thrust. His was held perpendicular, at right angles to Bull's, and met it sharply. The blades split, entered one another, and were locked. Instead of withdrawing, they pressed on furiously, driven by their savage eagerness to engage, to disarm the other. Face to face, their eyes popping with the strain, gasping, they stood like bulls with locked horns. Great blood vessels rose on their necks, their arms, strong with shoveling tons of earth into hells of fire, began to quiver with their conflicting effort.

The locked blades began to turn. Who was the stronger, who was forcing the movement? Over, slowly, trembling, they twisted until something gave way. It was Bull's grip that loosened. Quick as a flash Ole tossed the locked tools over his shoulder. Turning his head sidewise so that the eye unhampered by blood could see clearly, he drew back his right fist and hurled it forward like a stroke of lightning. Two crashes followed. First that of Bull as he struck the floor limply, then that of Ole as he collapsed across him.

No doubt as to who had won. Even the visitors cheered. Jock so far forgot mill discipline as to show favoritism, for it was he who lifted Ole and carried him to the water-tank. A white-jacketed man edged through the crowd and took up his duties. Red fought his way through and made himself a couch for the tawny head that was colored with red. Water, the strong smell of ammonia and Ole's head lifted. His hand brushed back the dripping hair that encumbered his vision and he looked about.

"Where's Bull?" he said. They had all forgotten Bull.

Ole struggled to his feet and with weak arms parted the ring of anxious men, making his wabbly way to where Bull lay. He stooped and tried to raise him, but failed, whereupon some of the men rushed to help and got Bull over to the tank. Forgetful of his own hurts, Ole bathed his victim until his eyes opened. It was Ole's blood-streaked face that Bull saw first from his one useful eye. He struggled erect, stood swaying and with fists doubled.

"Come on!" he mumbled through puffed lips. "I ain't whipped yet!"

"And never will be!" cried Ole, walking into the weakly swinging arms and throwing his own across Bull's shoulder. "You're too good a steel-man!"

Bull's jaw dropped. He pulled away from Ole's grip, looked drunkenly about at the circle of wide-eyed faces until he saw Jock's gray head.

"I want my time," he said to Jock. "I'm done."

"No you're not," said Ole quickly. "There's a lots of steel to be made yet. Lots of shoveling to do."

Bull turned his one good eye upon the man he had despised, then looked for a smiling face in the crowd of watchers. There was none. They were not even breathing.

"I'm done fightin' then," said he, "unless somebody picks on you."

"And unless you manhandle my shovel," added Ole.

A long sigh escaped from the tensely listening crowd, as though a blast of air had suddenly been released from the mighty blowers beneath them; a sigh more significant than the thundering applause of a cheering multitude. It wafted an invisible crown onto Ole's tousled white hair. What further might have happened will

never be known, for Jock Campbell, the wise old man who led men through steel-making hells, took command.

"Hey," he bellowed furiously, "what d'ye think this is—a tea party? This outfit's makin' steel today! Git t' yer furnaces, ye cinder-hoppin' blaggards. We're after a record this month!"

WHY THE HOOTERS LEFT

***By* Victor Shaw**

SHOULD you visit Prince of Wales Island, in the Alexander Archipelago, to hunt or prospect, you may note an odd fact—if you are observant. As you press through the jungle of underbrush among the thick spruce and fir, strike out across the open muskeg parks, or scale the beetling cliffs under snow-capped peaks, you will miss the familiar booming note of the blue grouse, or hooter. You will listen in vain, for the hooters are not there, although they are numerous on other near-by islands.

Probably no white man can explain this, but the Siwashes know all about it. Old "Chief Charley" knows. Walk over to this tyhee's cabin some day, down near Indian Town, where his grotesquely carved totem pole faces south brooding endlessly, with its many sightless eyes, on the salmon river and the sea, and ask him. Chief Charley is very old, now, wrinkled and bent and the hair that was black is whitened by the frosts of many winters. Too aged to hunt or fish, he sells furs and curios sitting all day in the sun dreaming perhaps of his vanished youth, when his back was like a young fir and his arm stout to paddle the slim dugout, or hurl the salmon spear.

But he knows the legends of his people, and if he knows you well, he may tell you why the hooters avoid that island, which is now called, "Prince of Wales."

A long, long time ago (he will commence) the island was the home of many of these birds of the big voice. They were thicker than they are now on other islands, or on the mainland. At first, they had plenty of room, for it is the largest of all the islands, and there was much food for all, with plenty of shelter for their nests. They were happy and content and began to increase so fast that bye and bye they swarmed over the island like mosquitoes on a bog.

The hens squabbled all day over the food and the chicks, and the males fought and made love so that the earth shook with the racket. In the spring, their hooting rolled through the mountains like thunder and the bears began to be annoyed, because the noise woke them too soon from their winter's sleep.

At first, the bears merely growled a protest, thinking it would stop the nuisance. When it failed, they told them to get out.

"*Kah nesika klatawa?* Where shall we go?" boomed the hooters.

"*Mika tumtum!* Anywhere you wish!" rumbled the bears.

But the hooters didn't leave and as time went on the trouble grew so bad that all the bears became *pchih*—thin—from lack of sleep, and many were getting *halo kwolann* —deaf—as well. Then, one day, unable to stand the terrible din any longer, the bears arose in a mighty whirlwind of wrath and literally swept every hooter off the island.

But, how? You may object—hooters can fly; bears can not.

Old Chief Charley will merely smile in a superior way at your supreme ignorance. Every one knows that bears are witch-doctors and can make magic; the hooters are gone, are they not? Well, then.

Anyway, the fact remains that no misguided hooter has since had the nerve even to try a straight flight over the island that is banned; no doubt for fear that he might go into a tail-spin and crash. That island is taboo, for those noisy fellows.

Great Adventures of the Super-Minds

—Plato

by *Post Sargent*

Author of "Hugo Grotius," "Cervantes," etc.

THIS morning of the year 388 before Christ the *agora* or market-place of Athens bustled with life. The great square was the daily meeting-place of most of the males of the city.

A group of young market-place idlers stood in the shelter of one of the porticos, debating what new interest they could create for themselves. Things had moved slowly this morning. They had, indeed, upset the booth of a foreign pedlar; had had a brawl with several *metics*, or non-Athenians, from the port city of the Piræus, four miles away; had even pelted a school-boy on his way to his private tutor, in charge of a *paidagogos* or "child-leader," a family slave.

To be sure, outside the Dipylon gate, the *gymnasia* or exercising-grounds known as the Academy, or those of the Lyceum to the east, offered refuge from the morning's boredom. But the best Athenian athletes were still at the quadrennial Olympia being held in Elis in honor of the father of the gods, and would not return for weeks to come. Meantime they chattered or gazed in discontent at the mighty Acropolis that towered above them in the center of the city.

A hush suddenly fell upon them as a slave went by driving an ass, loaded with a small chest and what seemed to be the bedding-roll of a traveler tied up in the customary linen sack. Behind walked a man to whom was accorded the deference of the youths. Along his path the democratic, but proud, citizens of Athens adopted a respectful attitude that marked him as a personage of great distinction in Athens, hence a man of renown in all Hellas and the world without.

To right and left were heard the greetings of the citizens of Athens. The traveler made stately response to each by name.

He passed on, and tongues wagged freely once more.

"'Tis Plato, the philosopher."

"'Tis said that he goeth on a long journey to see Dion, the Sage of Sicily."

"Nay, I have it on the best authority that Dionysius, Tyrant of Syracuse, has bid him to his court. He would be instructed in the duties of a monarch."

"More like he desires to remove from Athens to Syracuse the beacon-light of our learning."

"Didst see the *biblion* he carries in his hand? Doubtless it will be the 'Republic' that men speak most of these four years past and rank with Homer's immortal songs. Mayhap the 'Laws'—

"By Apollo, small joy will such writings give the Tyrant of Syracuse, for of him 'tis said that he favors only words said in his praise and lusts for the blood of those who speak in his despite."

An old man spoke up.

"Plato still grieves for his teacher Socrates, whom the Elders accused of impiety and forced to drink of the hemlock cup eleven years ago. Since that day, as is

known to all men, Plato doth write continually in praise of his teacher. For now ten years he hath voyaged to the uttermost ends of the earth, seeking the wisdom of Persia and Ind, or uncovering the hidden mysteries of Osiris and Isis in the land of the Pharaohs."

Meanwhile Plato had continued his way, entering at the southern end of the city the road that led to the Piræus, harbor town of Athens. The route lay between the Long Walls or "Legs"—parallel fortifications two hundred yards apart, twelve feet thick and thirty high. Extending the four-mile interval between city and sea, these great walls assured unbroken communication in times of war with Sparta or Corinth.

Arriving at the harbor, Plato found waiting for him the great galley sent by Dionysius to bear him to Sicily. Without delay the ship pulled from shore. With rhythmic beat of oars by day and night, alternate watches of fifty rowers being always at work, the galley pointed south, then westward on the morning of the third day. Making her cautious way between the mainland of Laconia and the island of Cythera, she finally laid her course due west on the broad bosom of the Mediterranean. Several weeks after their departure from Athens, crew and distinguished passenger sighted the city of Syracuse, the mighty Greek colony of western Europe.

With the chanted *op-o-òp* of the upper bank of rowers, and a *rhup-pa-pai* of the lower, the vessel proudly entered the Little Harbor. As they approached the shore, a Syracusan ship, decked out with gay streamers, dashed out to meet the illustrious visitor and escort him to land. And remarkable honor! Dionysius himself, greatly noted for his cruelty and over-weening pride, was waiting to greet him, standing in his chariot drawn by four milk-white horses, harnessed abreast.

His first words, no doubt well intentioned, were an index of his conceit, and even so early vaguely augured disaster.

"Greeting, O Sage of Athens! By Poseidon, who guided thy course over the waters of his kingdom, thou hast done well to hasten hither at my behest!"

He turned and indicated with a sweep of his hand the vast web of buildings and fortifications that covered the hills behind him.

"Behold a city fairer and mightier than aught thine eyes have seen. No will does Syracuse acknowledge save that of Dionysius; no wealth that is not mine for the taking. Abide with me, oh Plato, as my man, and untold riches and power will be thine."

With that simple dignity that even then impressed men, as it was to impress them through his written words for thousands of years to come, Plato made brief return.

"Hail, O Dionysius! Be not offended if I desire none of these."

He faced about towards the wooded hills that rose far behind the city walls. With hand outstretched he addressed the deities.

"Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one. May I reckon the wise to be the wealthy, and may I have such quantity of gold as none but the temperate may carry."

The eyes of the tyrant sparkled for a second with malice, but for once he did not yield to the fury of a thwarted will.

AT A word from him, his spearmen opened a road through the throng that had assembled near the wharves to witness the arrival of the famous Athenian. Wholly surrounded by his mercenaries, Dionysius, with Plato by his side, drove to a bridge that spanned a broad canal. Instead of taking the road to the right where the city lay in all its hugeness of heights and hollows, of market-place and temples, of massive walls and splendid public buildings, they turned to the left, crossing the bridge and passing through five fortressed gates—the entrance to the little island of Ortygia.

Ahead of him Plato now saw the sentried castle of Dionysius, and at the other end of the little isle, another castle that commanded the approaches by water. In the centuries to come, had the philosopher but known it, great captains, military engineers, and some of the medieval lords of Europe, were to pattern their defenses after those of Dionysius, whose despotism was thus rendered impregnable against revolt.

But that which was adamant for those without could well become an unescapable prison for those within, against whom the wrath of Dionysius should be directed. Plato, who had all too well felt the threat that lay close to the surface of his host's arrogance, now recognized the boundless

power of Dionysius for evil; for fierce and unhindered cruelty. But proud in his own integrity and unfaltering in courage, he had no thought of turning back. In common

with a select few of the great thinkers of the ancient world, he acknowledged the existence of the lesser gods. But above these was a greater God, whose power lay in righteousness and perfect justice.

The days passed. Within the walls of the castle the subtle conflict, initiated on the day of Plato's arrival, continued with increasing intensity. A dramatic conflict of minds, wherein the ruthless will and materialism of the most powerful despot of the ancient world were pitted against the intellect and idealism of humanity's greatest genius. The wise men and populace of Syracuse awaited with tense interest the issue of the struggle.

Strange rumors ran. Plato had fallen from the grace of the gods. Plato had cast aside the mask of idealism and purity and had joined Dionysius in unspeakable revels. Such a one had seen the great philosopher far gone in his cups. Such another had seen him in festal garb, surrounded by fair women and flushed with wine and love. The sage had yielded to the sybarite—the saint had turned satyr!

None knew whence came these evil reports. Honest men mourned. The cynics sneered—and rejoiced.

Meantime, with increasing impatience, Dionysius daily listened to Plato's discourses on the soul and man's duty to man. Subtly he tried to bend him to his will. While Dion and the other wise men of Syracuse hung breathless on the immortal words that fell from the Athenian's lips, Dionysius considered only how he might obtain his sanction for despotic rule. Himself of mean birth, usurper of power by intrigue and ruthless murder, his ire grew as Plato failed to feed his vanity by lies and flattery. To him the eternal truths that Plato read from his "Republic," or from the Apology or Crito, were abstruse and dull. No word they spoke of Dionysius.

But suddenly this talk of good and evil, of beauty and truth, of justice and tyranny, began to take on a sinister sound. Perhaps it was the preaching of a new form of revolt! The tyrant's anger fed on his suspicions—and became mania.

The threatened storm broke at last.

One evening, when Plato and his new disciples were gathered in the men's hall of the palace of the tyrant, with Dionysius brooding somewhat apart, the talk turned upon human virtue. Plato took the word.

"The life of the just man is blessed, while that of the unjust is wretched, however the contrary may seem. Ye ask me in what wise this touches the common lot of men, both the governed and their rulers. I conceive the truth stands thus:

"That city in which the destined rulers are least eager to rule, will inevitably be governed in the best and least factious manner; and a contrary result will ensue if the rulers are of a contrary disposition. *But if beggars and persons who hunger after private advantages take the reins of state, with the idea that they are privileged to snatch advantage from their power, all goes wrong.*"

Dionysius leaped to his feet with a snarl of rage.

"Barbed words, Athenian, that seem to seek me as their mark! Doubtless thy philosophy would deny to the ruler of Syracuse the qualities of justice and greatness. Speak! Let all men know thy thoughts!"

Plato replied calmly.

"Thou dost impute false motives to my words, Dionysius. None the less, I too should be false to my teachings, were I to be silent before thy questionings. Tyrant thou art, Dionysius, as thou dost know. Know further that power such as thine, conceived in blood, is not good in the sight of the gods; and tyrants least of all men have the divine qualities of justice and mercy. Yet in these lie true greatness."

Dionysius was beside himself with rage. Dion and the other Syracusans shuddered with apprehension as they looked at the furious despot and recalled the bloody

vengeance he had taken on those who opposed his will.

"If such was thy philosophy and such my seeming character, why didst thou venture to come to Sicily at my bidding?" the tyrant shouted. "Doubtless to sow discord among my subjects, and stealthily plot my downfall!"

"Nay, Dionysius, thy wrath is without cause, as thy words are puerile. But they swerve me not from the truth. In coming here at thy request, it was my thought that slanderous rumor, in painting thee black, had been but the handmaiden of jealousy. I had hoped that here in Syracuse I might find the truly virtuous man."

"Well, by the gods," cried Dionysius, "it appears that thou hast not yet found such an one!"

Dion and the others risked their lives at this point to intervene in an effort to appease the anger of the tyrant. Dionysius relapsed into a brooding silence, and the gathering broke up for the night, while the disciples of Plato departed with apprehension in their hearts.

Dion, with an ever-growing love and veneration for Plato, rose betimes the following morning, to urge on the philosopher the necessity of an early and speedy departure from Syracuse. But he was too late. The brooding of Dionysius throughout a sleepless night had fanned his anger to white heat. Now his fury demanded a victim. At dawn he summoned the captain of his guard, gave him brief orders and, at the end of a few minutes, Plato was led before him. Unperturbed and clear-eyed, the Sage of Greece quietly faced the Tyrant of Syracuse, who awaited him hot-eyed and malevolent.

"Athenian," he snarled, "thou hast betrayed my hospitality and thus forfeited the guest right. I find thee guilty of defaming me, of preaching sedition among my subjects, of seeking my overthrow by violence.

"The penalty for these crimes were properly death. But that thou mayest have time to ponder the justice and greatness of Dionysius, I have decreed that thy life be henceforth passed in the quarries of Syracuse.

"These same quarries, as thou dost perhaps know, were the tomb, some quarter-century ago, of seven thousand of thy fellow-Athenians, who came boastfully with army and fleet against this city. Athenian bones will bear thee company in the long hours of the night. Mayhap their marrow will give thee food, when thy philosophy fails to nourish."

Then, sneering:

"Consider well the real joys of life, Plato, that thou hast cast aside for thy spurious ones. And forget me not in the hour of death."

As the guards were about to lead Plato forth, the latter lingered a moment more, to say those words that have become part of the store of treasured sayings:

"Oh Dionysius, be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth—that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods. The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, you to live. Which is the better, God only knows."

PLATO was placed in the marble quarries that were later to be known in the days of Italian domination as the *Latomia del Paradiso*—Quarries of Paradise—in that part called the Philosopher's Quarry, in honor of a certain poet-philosopher named Philoxenus. Just a few years before the imprisonment of Plato, Dionysius had asked Philoxenus to give his opinion of certain parts of a poem written by the tyrant. Philoxenus drew his pen through the entire poem and was hurried to the quarries.

Some time later, desiring to have favorable judgment of a new poetic composition, Dionysius sent for Philoxenus and set the poem before him. The poet read the doggerel, looked piteously at the tyrant, gazed once more at the verses, then turning to the waiting soldiers, said those words that have passed into the idiom of several European nations—

"Have them take me back to the quarries!"

On this occasion Dionysius pardoned him.

Plato had ample opportunity on the day of his imprisonment and in succeeding days and nights to test the qualities and resources of his mind and soul. Protected against the elements only by a short woolen tunic and a mantle of the same material—universal dress of the Greeks of that epoch—neither the biting cold of night, nor the hard marble slab that served him as bed,

disturbed his serene composure. By day he had for view only the rock walls of the vast quarry pit and the patch of sky above. For company, only the night rodents, the birds—his thoughts.

These latter sufficed, for his mind was stored with all the scientific lore, with all the wisdom that the Orient and Egypt and the brilliant civilization of Greece had hitherto produced. On this he had placed the seal of his peculiar genius. Years later he was to transmit the whole to his inspired disciple, Aristotle, whose all-embracing intellect dominated the thought of the next twenty centuries.

And so Plato, leading only an inner life, paid little heed to the discomforts of the body, or the scant rations left each night by a soldier from the guard-house that topped the sheer walls of the quarries.

Meanwhile Dion, whose influence with Dionysius was great, bent every effort to effect the release of Plato. The tyrant, whose rancor was not yet appeased, pretended to yield to his appeals. Dion, overjoyed, hastened to the Quarries of Paradise. There after some search, he found the Greek philosopher.

It was in keeping with the suspicious nature of Dionysius that he should construct all his prisons with such acoustic properties that every sound within could be heard by a listening spy.

In the west wall of the quarries was a grotto hewn in the solid rock in the shape of the letter S. Two hundred feet deep, almost half as high and with an average width of twenty feet, this grotto had these remarkable acoustic properties. The faintest whisper far within was heard, magnified a thousand-fold, by persons at the entrance. Here Dionysius took delight in listening to the conversations of prisoners who thought themselves safe from espionage.

Here Dion found Plato, in what was afterward to be known as the Ear of Dionysius. The philosopher was intent on testing out those theories of shadows and realities, of light and sight and sound, that had entered into the "*Allegory of the Den*" in his greatest work, the "Republic." Never had the gods granted to sage and scientist such a laboratory for his experiments. Such opportunity more than repaid for pain and privation.

Now, while Dion was hurrying Plato to the harbor, where he was to be allowed to embark for Athens, Dionysius was whispering into the ear of Pollis, who was to voyage on the same trireme with the philosopher. Pollis, admiral of the fleet of Sparta, hereditary enemy of Athens, and on an embassy to the ruler of Syracuse, fell in with the plans of Dionysius. And so it came about that when the vessel was far out in the Mediterranean, Pollis sought opportunity secretly to kill Plato.

Such a crime would not only please the Tyrant of Syracuse, thus cementing the good relations between that city and Sparta, but would also serve the interests of Sparta, in removing a man whose intellect and moral influence were a menace to the autocratic power of Sparta.

But a slave had overheard the conversation of Dionysius and Pollis in the palace of the tyrant. The plot was immediately reported to Dion, who took what measures were possible for the safety of the philosopher. Plato was warned of his danger, before he embarked. Certain Athenian officers of the galley were likewise informed. Thus, when Plato was buried in sleep and unable to look after his own safety, a watch was kept upon him, lest Pollis or certain of his slaves should take the opportunity to kill him.

Since Sparta and Athens were just then at nominal peace with each other, Pollis did not dare to commit an open crime, but bided his time until the deed could be done with all the appearance of accident. For the same reason the Athenians did not venture to remove by violence the menace to Plato's life. And so matters rested until the galley had almost completed her journey.

Once more Plato saw the northern coast of the island of Cythera and made his prayers to the greater God, the while the sailors made their vows to Aphrodite, whose temple could be seen in the distance. A libation of unmixed wine was poured out to Pollux and Castor, twin deities of mariners, and the homeward course was set for Athens.

Almost within sight of the Piræus, however, when the Saronic Gulf was all but traversed and the gigantic statue of the goddess Athena would soon be seen upon the Acropolis, a furious tempest arose. The galley was tossed and battered by the winds and waves. The oars were torn from the hands of the rowers and many of the latter were washed overboard. On board the galley all was confusion.

Now if ever was the time for a successful attempt on the life of Plato. But Pollis and his men were just then too concerned with their own safety. Now was the time to appease Poseidon, god of all the seas, rather than anger him by murder in his domain. It might even be that the Athenian Plato was under his special protection.

And so each man looked to his own salvation.

Buffeted high by the raging water, or plunged to seemingly unfathomable depths, the crew and passengers had given up hope, when land was sighted only a short distance away. A billow mightier than the rest bore them on its crest and finally flung them on the shore. When the living, dazed and exhausted, managed to separate themselves from the wreckage of the galley and stagger to firmer ground, they found themselves, by well known signs, on the island of Aegina. Plato was once more on hostile soil.

The inhabitants of Aegina, always sworn enemies of the Athenians, were at this time leagued with Corinth in active hostilities against Athens. The sentries on the city walls had seen and reported the wreck of Plato's galley and the subsequent landing of the survivors. A squad of soldiers was despatched to bring in the shipwrecked men. Great was their surprize to find among the survivors two such noted men as Pollis and Plato. The ruler of Aegina was of two minds with regard to the disposition he should make of the philosopher.

His closest advisors were strongly of the opinion that the latter was a mere dreamer, without guile and innocent of any of the wrongs caused by Grecian politics. They advised that he be set at liberty, with safe-conduct back to Athens. The majority of the officers and citizens saw only a hated Athenian, and were in favor of holding him as a hostage. A few, even, advocated putting him to death.

POLLIS, however, admitted to private audience with the ruler of the island-state, solved the perplexing problem. Making free use of the potent names of Sparta and Syracuse, he asserted that Plato had been given to him as slave by Dionysius. He further declared that it was his intention to sell the philosopher who had deeply offended Dionysius, and who now bored him, Pollis, with his idle talk. He called upon the Aeginetan, in the name of the ruler of Sparta and of the dreaded Tyrant of Syracuse, to respect the oaths of amity that bound the three states.

Never did argument meet with easier victory. The following day the philosopher, scarcely recovered from his fatigue and hurts, was led out to the market-place and there sold to the highest bidder, like the lowest felon or the meanest slave. With the example of Socrates always before his eyes, he took his new fate calmly—even without bitterness.

But his trials were almost at an end. Those good men who had advised his release took counsel together. Great was their indignation that Plato should be put to shame, and that Aegina should be put to greater dishonor by so treating the most illustrious of living men. When they had discussed their grief and bemoaned their penury, one Anneceris of Cyrene, who lived on the opposite coast of Africa, arose in the gathering and pledged all his worldly goods to ransom Plato.

By some means he gathered together the required twenty pounds of silver that was paid over to Plato's master. Plato went free. Passage was taken on a galley bound for some point on the coast of Attica and Plato was put on board. A few days later he saw again the busy market-place of Athens and the towering Acropolis, from which the statue of Athena gazed far out to sea—sentry and guardian of her wandering children.

The great gardens named the Academy outside the Dipylon gate were now transformed. Once merely the strolling place for the learned or languid, or the exercising grounds for the many athletes of the city, it became in the course of years the site of a school, where the intellectually eager flocked to hear Plato expound his views. Chief among his pupils was Aristotle who attended the master for twenty years, until his own wisdom was ripened and secure.

For these twenty years the dream of Plato was in process of fulfillment. He presided with increasing glory over the destinies of his school. Faithful to his principles, avoiding the debates and storms of politics, he buried himself in the study of the profoundest verities of human existence. Yet, suddenly, we see him to our great surprize once more visitor in Syracuse.

Dionysius is dead. Another Dionysius

reigns. And the new ruler would fain sit at the feet of Plato to learn the duties of a monarch. But the son had inherited the vices and weaknesses of the father, without any of his great qualities.

Received with flattering honors, the philosopher has every reason to hope that his teachings will this time bear fruit. On landing, he finds a royal chariot magnificently adorned in his honor. Dionysius offers a sacrifice to the gods as for the happiest event of his reign. Within the castle the simplicity of the food, the modest garb of the courtiers, the gentleness of the new ruler give rise to hopes of marvelous changes for the better.

But the leopard spots have not changed. Jealousy and intrigue work against Plato, and Dionysius becomes his enemy. Wearied of the incessant attacks upon his teachings and motives, Plato finally asks permission to return home. After months of waiting his prayer is heard: he is contemptuously dismissed by the tyrant who, like his father, has vainly tried to bend him to his despotic views.

His work in the gardens of the Academy was done. His doctrines were known in all Hellas and wherever else men strove to rise to nobler moral and intellectual heights. The only fame that Plato cared to have was his. For years he continued his instruction outside the Dipylon gate, followed in his walks and talks by eager crowds. But the day came when he was very old; when the superb physique and the intrepid spirit that had sustained him in all his philosophic adventuring were no more.

Then the gods came and took him, in the eightieth year of his life. But they left behind that *biblion*, that roll of papyrus, known as the "Republic."

THE MALICE OF MORGAN

by John L. Considine

ALTHOUGH the methods of the Australian bushranger were much the same as those of our Western road-agent, his technical terminology was different in some respects. What we call a holdup, he referred to as a stickup. And he demanded submission in different words. Instead of "Hands up!" he would command, "Bail-up!" thus adding insult to injury, for a bail is a contrivance, somewhat on the principle of the stocks, in which a cow's head is fixed while she is being milked.

The bushranger was sometimes provoking in more ways than this. Morgan, the most famous of them all, became particularly so toward the end of his career. He held up a wool-shed at shearing-time and called upon the overseer, against whom he bore a grudge, to come out and kneel down to be shot. The man's wife rushed out and flung herself down in front of her husband, imploring Morgan to shoot her instead. The bushranger relented enough to tell the man to "clear out." But then he amused himself by forcing the owner to make out checks for all the shearers and finally a big one for himself, thus making himself popular with the shearers and vexatious to their employer.

One scorching day he fell in with the manager of a run.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the indiscreet manager as they rode through the brush together, "where did you get that horse? He bears my brand."

"Just tumble off your own nag," retorted Morgan, "or I'll put daylight through you."

Looking into the muzzle of a gun, the manager dismounted.

"Now, pull your clothes off—every stitch."

And the manager had to walk the nine miles home naked under a blistering sun.

His final appearance was in Victoria, where he held up a station, assembled all the people in one room, and made the daughters of the house play the piano all night. In the morning, as he was walking, shielded from attack, as he believed, by the presence of the owner of the run on one side and a neighbor on the other, and armed as usual with two revolvers, a station hand snatched up a gun and shot him through the back at a distance of forty paces.

La Rue of the 88

A Five-Part Story
Part IV

by Gordon Young

Author of "Days of '49," "Pearl-Hunger," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

BEFORE the railroad came to Perez, a little adobe village of the southwestern cattle country, old George La Rue bought a ranch sixty miles from town, which he called the Eighty-Eight. One day Monk Cunningham, the unscrupulous owner of the neighboring ranch called on the La Rues. Next day Mrs. La Rue left her husband and child and was never heard of again.

As young Larry La Rue, the son, grew up he became more and more worthless, and ran to worse and worse companions. His father stood drunkenness, lies, theft, even close association with Cunningham from Larry; but when Larry ruined the innocent and beautiful daughter of old Hendryx, La Rue ordered his son from his door forever. Young Larry fled the country, and disappeared from sight.

Time passed. It was now twenty years from the time when La Rue first came to Perez. There was a railroad, and with it came numbers of people. Hotels grew up; stores, restaurants, dance halls. There were more ranchers than before. There was Jake Spencer and the Hammarsmiths, who hated each other. The Spencer outfit because things were said about old Jake's wife and young Cliff Hammarsmith while the Hammarsmith outfit returned the compliment. There were also two youngsters, Tom Walker and Blade Jones, who had a small ranch. They used Cunningham's water, and were universally hated by him and all his political friends in town. Of these politicians the chief was Jim Barley, a cripple who owned a dance hall and told the Mexican townspeople how to vote.

One day old George was reading a letter in Barley's café when a stranger stepped in.

La Rue looked up, startled, and fumbled for his gun. The stranger fired and killed La Rue.

"Anything to say, gentlemen?" he asked. "Say it now. Boyd's my name, an' I'm ridin' out a here now. This here settles an ol' battle."

"You fought fair," they said and let him go. But they wondered who would get the ranch now. They had no idea where young La Rue was.

The letter in old George's hand was from his niece saying that she and her mother were on their way to visit him. Jim Barley was appointed administrator of the La Rue ranch.

A HORSEMAN rode into Perez and stopped at Pop Murdock's Santa Fé saloon. His face was bronzed and hard.

He looked at the reward signs on the wall, where, conspicuously, there stood a card which read:

WANTED
DEAD OR ALIVE
BUCK HARRISON

"Bourbon," he said to Pop.

Said Pop to himself:

"Here's one bad hombre. Young, but he's learned." Aloud he said—

"Who are you?"

"La Rue," said the man. "Laurence La Rue."

After some talk with Pop Murdock and a little affair with Slab Saunders, town bad man and foreman of the Eighty-Eight under Barley, over a card game, La Rue informed Slab that he was no longer foreman and backed up his statement with a gun.

Later, in the I.X.L. saloon, he made friends with a young puncher by the name of Red Clark and a girl called Nora. Hendryx, turning from the piano, recognized him as La Rue, and Jim Barley was called in to talk things over.

Barley claimed that old George La Rue had left a will cutting young Larry off, and offered to destroy the will and give him ten thousand dollars for a bill of sale for the ranch. La Rue refused and Barley threatened him, promising to talk the matter over with Slab Saunders and see Larry later.

LATER in the I.X.L. saloon La Rue met old Jake Spencer. Spencer refused to believe this man to be La Rue, much to the surprize of honest Red Clark, whom La Rue had hired as top hand for the Eighty-Eight. Later Barley saw La Rue and tried to bully him into signing a bill of sale to the ranch

by pretending that he had found a will leaving the Eighty-Eight to old George's niece and sister who were now residing at the ranch. La Rue refused to believe the will story, and left Barley beaten and angry.

As he came from the interview the girl Nora looked strangely at him.

"I wonder if she knows that I'm Buck Harrison," he thought.

He remembered having once met this girl when he was robbing a train.

"I've got four hundred dollars here; and I worked like —— for it," she had said.

"Then you keep it, girlie," he had answered.

BUCK, Juan Hurtados a Mexican servant of his, and Red Clark rode out to the Eighty-Eight ranch. They heard the Negro cook refuse to give food to Mrs. Allen, old George La Rue's sister, and her daughter, Jane. He discovered that Saunders was trying to starve the women out.

"It's all right," he told them, "Saunders is fired."

But they seemed unwilling to accept him as a friend. That night Saunders' men returned to the bunk house and Buck, listening outside, overheard them say that they were rustling cattle from the Eighty-Eight, and that they hoped to be able to scare La Rue off his own ranch.

Coolly he walked in and told them to get out. There was something about the man that frightened them into doing it.

"You can't have your blankets until you bring my cattle back," he said. "And you can't bring my cattle back without horses. Go into the corral and catch some."

But the horses were too wild to catch; and Windy Mills and Saunders' other men stayed out in the cold all night trying to catch horses. Buck and his two men sat in the bunk house with guns to prevent the men from returning.

Finally the expelled punchers lit a fire.

"Kick out that fire," shouted Buck. "D'ya think I want my corrals burnt up."

"It's cold," cried Windy.

"Run around. Jump up an' down. Keep warm thataway," said Buck.

Nothing more was shouted, but Buck could hear the men cursing as they scattered the fire with their boots.

NEXT morning after Buck had forced Saunders' men to tell him where they were keeping his cattle he gave them horses and let them go.

Buck, Red, Mrs. Allen and Jane went to the Spencers' ranch for the day, Buck riding, Red driving the buckboard with Mrs. Allen and Jane. Jake and Buck had a talk.

"I'm Buck Boyd," said Harrison, "an' old George La Rue stole a ranch from my pa in the old days on the border. I reckon I deserve some of the Eighty-Eight. That's why I'm here."

"Jack Boyd's son?" asked Jake. "Then I'm for ya'. Any one who knew Jack in the old border days would fight for him."

Later Jake told the women that La Rue of the Eighty-Eight was all right, and was working for them and not against them.

When they returned to the Eighty-Eight they found that the place had been ransacked, and that old Juan Hurtados had been killed. On the corpse was pinned the following letter:

Warnen. Git out the country. This here shows weuns means business. Wimmen an' all, git out. Signed: You to you—LA RUE.

Buck wrote Spencer a letter asking for reinforcements and telling Jake that he had decided that he had no right to do the women out of the ranch.

When he had dispatched it a man rode up and told him that Saunders' men had killed one of his partners and wounded another, and that they were at Wild Horse valley.

Buck rode over with him, waiting outside the shack where Saunders' men were, until dawn. Then he stepped suddenly in the door and shot, both guns blazing. Only two were not killed.

Buck came back to find his father arrived at the Eighty-Eight. Boyd told him that there was a war on between Spencer and the Hammarsmiths. Every one was riding toward the Arrowhead to help Jake.

Red Clarke, walking beside some bushes, overheard Buck say to his father:

"Dad, as shore as my name's Buck Harrison I'm gonna get that Saunders."

Red did not know what to make of it. He, an honest man, working for an outlaw.

"Well," he said to his horse, "what d'you make of it, ya lanky piece a crow feed."

But the powerful black made no answer.

RED kept away from the house all morning. He went up for dinner—Mrs. Allen and Jane had tried to cook for the men—then returned to his horse. He was, very methodically, making friends with the black, talking to him, petting him, climbing in and out of the saddle, getting the horse to understand.

Shortly after dinner the impassive Boyd, who would stand by the hour against a corner of the house, looking out over the hilly country as if aimlessly, detected a horseman far off approaching over the road that led to Perez. The man would disappear and reappear as the road curved over and down the hills.

Buck and his father watched for some time, then Buck walked down to where Red was sitting on the ground, brooding:

"You're lookin' sad-like. What's the matter with yuh?"

"This here hoss won't talk, me askin' plain questions, too."

"What you askin' 'im?"

"I been tryin' to get him to fore-tell me what's goin' happen. He don't 'pear to have no more sense than me, the which is plumb little."

The rider whose coming had been noticed approached. He was a young Mexican boy, and took out a sealed envelop from inside his sombrero, handing it to Buck.

Buck read and reread. It was from

Nora, the I.X.L. girl; and she had written just about as she talked:

Ive got to see you, Mister whoever you are, and its so important youd better come soon as you get this here. This aint womans talk. Cunningham, Barley and another fellow had a long talk here yesterday about you and I had my ear to a nothole. Even if you aint who I think you are I am your freind. If you are who I think you are, you aint got no better freind than me no place.

—Nora Healy.

Red eyed him as Buck silently spelled out the letter, and when he reread it, Buck said:

"I shore got to get to town! I shore do an' travel fast—"

He broke off to reread the letter thoughtfully again.

"What's up?" asked Red.

"I got word from a friend o' mine that's heard Cunnin'ham an' Barley talkin'. With you an' my—my friend Boyd here, an' the girl to help load an' shoot, I reckon the ranch here is safe enough for me to ride around an' see folks."

"Lissen," said Red. "I think I'll ride out a piece with yuh. This hoss needs some more instructions."

"Yo're welcome, son."

Buck went up to the house and had a few words with his father. Buck said:

"She knows who I am I reckon, an' she's friendly on account o' that time I met her on the train. She's heard somethin' or she wouldn't 'a' wrote. An' if I don't go in an' have a talk she's liable to get mad an' blab. I've got a feelin' we're not goin' to hang 'round this part o' the country much longer, so I've got 'a' work fast."

Boyd, after a long silence, spoke gravely:

"If there's a woman givin' you news, she'll want some pay; an' usual when a woman wants pay, it's a feller's heart or head. There's a big price on yourn. If she knows what you think she knows, she can get it."

"I'll trust 'er," said Buck. "She ain't no such woman for to admire as that girl here, but this here Nora is the kind that will stand up for a feller that's done her a favor."

Boyd said nothing. His days of outlawry were over, and the wary old Gray Wolf had lapsed into a kind of fatalism.

The Mexican boy was sent up to the house to get something to eat; and Buck and Red rode off together. When they had gone some distance from the house and eased from a lope into a trot to let their horses breathe, Red said, "Whoa!" and that instant Buck was looking into a six-shooter.

"Pull down an' put 'em up!" said Red. "I may be committin' of suicide, but I gotta talk!"

"Have you gone loco?"

"Yeah. Jus' about. Raise yore hands!"

"Lissen," said Buck, looking hard and speaking quietly. "Puttin' my hands up won't help you none." He had slipped his left foot from the stirrup and sat at ease; one lurch and he would be hanging along the off side of his horse, with gun drawn and blazing from under the horse's neck. But he had a real liking for this fool Red, and demanded again—

"What's the matter with you anyhow?"

Then Buck raised his hands slightly.

"That's better," said Red. "'Cause I like you an' I don't want-a shoot. But you gotta talk. Who are *you?*"

"La Rue o' the Eighty-Eight. That's me."

"An' young Harrison?"

"Yes," said Buck. "How'd you guess?"

"I didn't. I heard yuh say so yesterday to Boyd—he's yore dad. Ain't he?"

Buck nodded.

"An' I been a heap troubled ever since," Red said in a troubled voice also. "You ain't done right in gettin' me in this fix. You've made me like you, an' I don't know what'o do!"

"Now you've got me slick an' clean," Buck suggested, "I 'spose I'm to be herded into town ahead o' you. There's that reward an'—"

"I'll plug you shore, you talk that away to me! Is *she* yore cousin?"

"No. I jus' horned myself in as young La Rue to grab the ranch."

"You ain't acted like it. An' them women they jus' set around admirin' you. You ain't been meanin' to steal from *them?*"

"Things they have got a little mixed," said Buck coolly, not at all trying to defend himself by explanations. There was no need; he was too confident of his own skill with a gun to be troubled by being under the muzzle of a man who stopped to talk.

"An' me I've got mixed up in 'em. *Me*—an' *you* Buck Harrison!"

"Now, son, you speak up clear an' plain," said Buck coldly, "'cause I'm listenin' hard. What you goin' do to me?"

"Well lissen, you ain't been makin' no

fight for to steal that ranch. You been makin' a fight to keep other folks from stealin' 'er. You been doin' it for them women, ain't you now?"

"If Buck Harrison's word is any good to you, I'll say yes."

"Why?" demanded Red.

"Why have you throwed in with the women? You're makin' the fight too."

"Me, I'm gittin' wages."

"What are we goin' a-do about it?" asked Buck in a tone almost companionable.

"This here is what: I like you fine, but I won't throw in with no danged outlaw. Me, gittin' wages, I'm still ridin' an' shootin' for them women, an' I stick till the Sulphur Lake she's froze hard 'nough for elyphants to cross. Nobody knows I heard you say you was Buck Harrison. If I'd had sense enough I'd figgered it out before, but I didn't know jus' where you stood. Now jus' as long as yo're fightin' for the Eighty-Eight, I'm jus' a puncher ridin' with yuh. I don't know nothin' about no Buck Harrison. I'm kinda mixed up in the way I talk, but I'm worse mixed up in the way I feel."

With that, Red jammed his gun back into its holster.

"Just what do you mean by that?" asked Buck, slipping his toe back into the stirrup.

"I'm goin' turn right around an' go back to the ranch. I'm workin' for the *owner* o' the Eighty-Eight. I don't know nothin' about nobody, an' from now on I'm goin' a-keep my mouth so tight shut I'll have to pry it open, forc'ble, even for to eat!"

"Red, ten days ago anybody that sprung my name on me like you done would a-been shot. But I've got to know you purtty well, an' I'm willin' to trust you. You're a white man."

"I ain't. I'm a dang fool!"

"Yeah, I knowed that, too, when there in town I saw yuh hunch forward to draw agin that barkeep as had the drop on yuh. You was sorta interestin' to me—that, an' the way you talked. I been likin' you better an' better ever since. Why —— yore onery red-headed soul, I jus' can't help likin' yuh!"

"Theoretic," said Red, wrinkling his face from the strain of trying to think, "I ain't got no use a-tall for you, but personal I ain't never met nobody I liked so much. I'm goin' back to the ranch."

"No you ain't. You're comin' on into town with me."

"But there's nobody to the ranch except Boyd."

"That there is enough, seein' it is my dad. That there pack hoss you saw him bring in is carryin' mostly carterges, an' he's savin' of 'em in that he don't offen shoot twict at the same man. I've got to talk to you, an' we can't be settin' here. Let's ride. Us outlaws, we ain't such bad fellers at times. Y'see the proudest thing in my ol' Dad's life ain't robbin' trains an' dodgin' posses—it's makin' a fight onct down in Oklahoma for some pore bedraggled nester what cowmen's killers, like now, tried to run out. One o' the nester's girls, she was my mother. Yuh see, it was this away—"

They rode on, Red listening, impressed, but when the story was done he said unhappily, stubbornly:

"Now this here is a fac'. I ain't no hand much for lyin', but I'm goin' swear to ever' livin' man, an' up in Heaven too when I git there, that I didn't know you was Buck Harrison. I don't anyhow. You say you are, but you may be lyin'—you don't act like him. An' because it's so I gotta say it too: If you make ary break that shows the outlaw stickin' through, right there an' then, I'm agin yuh! I'm agin yuh, though I've seen yuh draw an' seen yuh shoot. No man he was ever in my fix before!"

"I can see clear through you, Red. You'd light out, get plumb away from me, but for them women. You wanta see them get a square deal. Me, I'd cut an' run too, but I'm in much that there same fix as you are. As you was sayin', things they have shore got mixed up. Let's be pushin' on a little faster."

V

LATE that evening they rode into Perez and swung from their horses before the Santa Fe saloon. Murdock, heavy, slow, impassive, was alone. He stood at the bar and, pencil in hand, gazed down in a kind of perplexity at a piece of cardboard. The front door was closed. Only one light was burning.

As they came clattering in he looked up. He had an odd sort of slowness for a man who was respected by gunmen.

"Hello Pop!" said Buck, dropping a coin to the bar.

Murdock looked from one to the other, then stared steadily at Buck, and spoke with leisurely heaviness:

"My place she's closed. I ain't sellin' no likker tonight. But as you boys have come far we'll have a little somethin'. How now do yuh spell *tempair-ly?*"

"Don't know," said Buck.

"T-e-n-p- somethin' or other. I quit. What's it for?" said Red.

"I'm puttin' up a sign on my door, Closed Tempair-ly," said Murdock, then he stooped and lifted the stone jug from under the bar. "How's things out yore way?"

"Quiet, sorta," said Buck.

"Yeah. Unhuhn. So we been hearin'." He filled the glasses, slowly, seeming to count the drops, but filling each glass to the brim. "Yeah. A nigger come 'lopin' in t'other night—scared plumb white, he was. He told us how quiet it was."

"That cook—I wondered what had become o' him!"

"I reckon he's clear back down to Georgy by now. That's where he 'lowed he was goin'—clear home to his mammy. He said Saunders an' some men rode down on the ranch while ever'body they was gone, 'cept him an' that greaser o' yourn. They downed the greaser, then tore up ever'thing a-lookin' for the will, ol' George's will. They tol' the cook to cook. But he sneaked out, got on a hoss an' got away. Nex' day he took the train. But he lef' quite some remarks behind 'im. Unhuhn. Here's how!"

They drank, then Murdock, beginning to fill the glasses again, said:

"Onct more, an' that'll be all. But we'll not be in no hurry."

"Why you closin' up?" Buck inquired.

"Unh? Oh I got some business as takes me outta town f'r a spell."

"Why don't yuh get a barkeep while you're gone?" Red asked.

"Son," said Murdock slowly, eying Red, "A barkeep might not treat folks like I want 'em treated. Then folks wouldn't have the same respectful feelin's toward the Santa Fé. I do things my own way, *allus!*" Then to Buck: "This here might interest you a mite: Cunnin'ham he's been to town. Come with a half dozen men f'r escort. He come too with a feller as don't look nothin' like you, but son, this feller looks—" Murdock stopped and turned his eyes on Red, inquiringly.

"He knows now," said Buck promptly, "I'm not La Rue—same as you an' Jake Spencer."

"Unh-huhn. Well, this feller with Cunnin'ham looks jus' about like what I'd expect you to look if you *was* La Rue."

"So?" Buck inquired.

"So," Murdock affirmed.

"But I heard—Juan told me—him an' Cunnin'ham wasn't friends an' couldn't be, on account of a little somethin' that had happened between 'em, years ago."

"Fellers as are plumb bad to the core can allus make up. Now don't ask me *why*, if he is La Rue, he ain't declared hisself, 'cause I don't know. I don't know as he is. But I hear tell as how since then Barley 's been hoppin' first on one foot, then t'other, the which, seein' he's a cripple, is some active, an' a-cussin' *you*.. An' I hear too ol' Hendryx took a shot gun an' went around talkin' to hisself about havin' seen La Rue. Folks think he's jus' crazy."

"But see here, Pop. The old fellow cussed me out for La Rue too."

"He didn't have his specs on that time, I reckon. Did he? Well, without his specs he onct mistook me f'r Jim Barley, the which was insultin', specs or no specs. That there's all the news I got. Now how do yuh reckon we can spell this *tempair-ly?*"

"What you need it for?" asked Buck.

Murdock pointed down along the bar, and at the far end lay a belt full of cartridges, a Winchester in a scabbard, and a revolver in a holster.

"I hear as how Jake is havin' a little set-to. I'm gettin' old an' loggy, but I don't yit have to set a buckboard, like Cunnin'-ham. I'm ridin' out to Jake's place in the mornin' to stay a spell. I got to put me up a sign sayin' I'll be back so Jim Barley an' such-like won't feel too happy over my de-partchure."

No one spoke for a time, then Buck inquired mildly—

"Pop, did you ever hear tell of a feller named Jack Boyd?"

"Huhn-nn?"

"Jack Boyd?"

"I reckon, some. Why you askin'?"

"He's my father."

Murdock regarded Buck steadily, searchingly, then nodded a little:

"You are, huhn? Was it him as shot ol' George here in town?— Yes, I am list'nin', clost."

Murdock did listen, thoughtfully, impassively; he asked a question or two, but made no comment.

"—now we're sorta all friends here," said Buck, leaning both elbows on the bar, bending forward, "an' I've put my cards down, face up—"

"No you ain't neither," said Red Clark to himself. "You ain't tellin' that Jack Boyd is ol' Harrison or who you really are!"

"—an' I'm playin' a straight game. So would you mind tellin' me, 'cause I'm cur'ous, jus' why that night when you knowed I wasn't La Rue—the night I rode into town, jus' why you took it easy-like? You knowed I wasn't La Rue."

"Yeah. I knowed it. An' kep' my mouth shut though my intentions, son, they was in a way dishoner'ble. Y'see, I knowed the sort o' man La Rue was bound to be. Yit I figgered you had come in for to play Jim Barley's game. But I said to myself, 'Barley he can't no more handle this *hombre*'—meanin' you—'than a child can set a bronco.' It bein' Barley's inborn instinks to treat ever'body crooked, I figgered you'd likely up an' shoot 'im. Them was my prelim'nary argyments. After the way you climbed Saunders, I wasn't so —— shore that you was playin' Barley's game. I didn't know what you was after, but I figgered it wouldn't do no harm to let you have yore head an' see jus' *what* you would do. I talked it over with Jake. He r'ared an' bucked hard agin my idee, Jake did; but I soothed him down. An' t'other day he sent me in word as how I'd called the turn. So you see, when you rode in tonight I already knowed you was Jack Boyd's son. Jake he'd sent word. But I was interested in havin' you tell me. Jack Boyd he got in the habit o' doin' some things as was wrong, but us as knowed him right well liked 'im. Now I've got to git my notice wrote, 'cause I'm ridin', come daylight. I want that there word *tempair-ly* spelt, an' when I want somethin' I have it my way, allus!"

"We might shake dice to see what letters to use," Red suggested.

Murdock gazed upon him with tolerance:

"I knowed a jestice o' peace onct as done that to see if fellers was guilty, an' he came nearer bein' a judic'ous jedge than most. He wasn't none infloonced by prejudice—'cept with greasers. He wouldn't use his dice on them. They was guilty anyhow. Now Adams, the editor o' our paper, who's had some misplaced edycation, is gettin' out his paper tonight. One o' you boys step round to the *Mercury* office an' ask him how to spell this here word, 'cause I ain't goin' let no word think I can't git it spelt, somehow. Then we'll have our partin' drink."

"I'll go," said Red.

"No, me, I'll go," said Buck. "Where's the ink shop?"

"Up the street a piece an' turn left. You'll see a sign," Murdock explained.

Buck went as directed and found the little shanty-like office of the Perez *Mercury;* and pausing to look inside the door before entering, saw Adams busy under a lamp at the case.

Adams got copy, set type, read proof, made up the forms, ran the press and delivered the papers, for which he got twenty dollars a week.

"Howdy," said Buck, stepping into the open door.

Adams, in shirt sleeves with eye-shade pulled low, was very inky, sickly, almost pitiable. He gave Buck a startled glance. Though very careful of what he put in the paper, Adams was in perpetual dread lest some one might be offended.

"Oh you! How are you?" he said with anxious friendliness.

"Fine," said Buck. "I never saw inside an ink shop before."

"Interesting," said Adams; and at a rattling rate he began to explain how type was set, put into form and printed. "And one man, if he is the editor, he reaches everybody," said Adams with a kind of sickly pride. "Men can kill the editor," went on this editor, who was in great dread of being killed, "but what he has written is read by all men."

"What they want to kill 'im for?" Buck inquired. "Must be quite a trick for to get another feller as could pick out all them little jimcracks from them little corrals an' herd 'em straight."

"It is," said Adams, growing more proud. "But dishonest men fear the truth, and editors tell the truth."

"You ort-a practice shootin' then. But what I come for, is how do you spell *temper*-somethin' or other. *Temp-air-ly*, that's it. Murdock over the Santa Fé wants to know."

Adams suspected some kind of practical joke, but he took a piece of paper and wrote *temporarily*.

Buck went back to the Santa Fé and with a flourish of accomplishment laid the written word on the bar. Murdock hung over it doubtfully, then straightened up and shook his head.

"No, this here won't do. Them as can read it will know I never wrote 'er. Them as can't, won't know what she means. I'll jus' write:

"*Closed for a spell but I'll be back. Murdock.*"

VI

BUCK and Red entered the I.X.L. together, coming shoulder to shoulder through the door with the air of men expecting trouble, rather wanting it.

There were many men lounging at the bar, some clustered about the faro table. One of the girls was hammering away at the piano.

Nora was dealing. She looked up and quickly laid down the box, and there was a stare of alarm and surprize in her dark eyes.

Lynn, the bartender, leaning lazily on his elbows, straightened up, letting his hands hang below the bar.

Barley was not in the saloon. His manager, the dapper Mack, was at the bar beside a tall broad sun-blackened man, very quiet of manner with a look of stern composure on his face; and Mack whirled about, watchfully. The quiet man in the large black hat and long black coat looked around, sensing trouble, but placed his back to the bar and leaned against his elbows, waiting.

"Where's Barley?" said Buck.

"An' you there, behind that bar," said Red, eying Lynn, "git yore hands up in sight or I'll—"

Men along the bar scattered to the right and left instantly, all excepting the stern stranger in black hat and coat, who turned slightly, eying Lynn.

Lynn hesitated a moment, then—

"I keep my hands where I—"

"Don't be a fool!" Nora shouted at him.

"Don't start it, Lynn! Don't!" Mack yelled.

"Ow! That's La Rue!" the girl who had swung about on the piano stool yelled.

The tall, broad man in black frowned slightly, looking from Buck to Red as if trying to distinguish which of them was La Rue; then, with unmistakable authority, as if used to being obeyed at all times, turned his head slightly, speaking to Lynn:

"Don't *you* start no trouble!"

Lynn still hesitated, then put his hands flat on the bar, but as if he would not raise them higher for anybody.

"Where's Barley?" Buck demanded again.

"Are *you* La Rue?" asked the sternly quiet man in black.

"Yeah! La Rue o' the Eighty-Eight," said Buck defiantly.

The man in black looked at him sternly for some moments, and those in the saloon seemed to hold their breath. Then he spoke—

"You an' me better have a talk private, young fellow."

"Who are you?"

The man calmly opened his coat and exposed the gold badge of a United States Marshal.

It became so quiet within the room that the stamp of horses outside was heard, and the far off voices of men in the street.

Buck lifted a tobacco sack and papers from his shirt pocket and, without removing his eyes from the Marshal, began rolling a cigaret. Even the faint crisp rattle of the brown paper could be heard. He put the cigaret between his lips, drew a match also from the shirt pocket, lighted his cigaret but not for an instant dropping his eyes. The only words spoken fell as if Red Clark was talking aloud to himself—

"She's come!"

"Who," the Marshal inquired, "are you?"

"Me, Red Clark. I'm ridin' an' shootin' for her as owns the Eighty-Eight."

"Her, who?" said the Marshal.

"Miz Allen."

"And who is he?" The Marshal indicated Buck.

"He can talk for hisself," said Red.

The Marshal answered with the quiet dignity of one not easily ruffled:

"Then we'd better all step aside an' have a talk. Come along out here in back."

He looked at Buck for a moment, then turned his back and walked toward the rear.

"Come on!" said Nora, rising, motioning toward Buck.

"Nora!" Mack shouted angrily.

"Keep out o' that! Set down!" Lynn yelled at her.

"You go to ——!" she answered. "All

you!" And overturning the chair behind her, she moved hurriedly to the side of the Marshal, who had stopped at the back of the saloon, had turned and was waiting.

Buck hesitated, doubtful of whether to walk into what might be a trap, or to make a break, jump to his horse and go.

"Come on!" Nora called insistently.

"Nora, if you—" Mack began.

"I'm through here!" she cried. "You let me 'lone! I know what I'm doin'!"

"Are you coming?" asked the Marshal.

"Yeah," said Buck, and walked across the long room with heavy jingling stride; and Red followed.

They entered the back hallway, and Nora threw open a door.

"This here's not being used."

Nora fumbled for a match, struck it, lighted a lamp. The Marshal followed her in, his back turned to Buck; but Buck paused, hands lowered to his hips, peering into the room.

The room was one used at times for poker games. There was a round table and many chairs, nothing else. No one could be hiding there. It was not a trap. Buck went in.

"Me, I'll stay here an' see nobody lissens," said Red, pausing at the door.

The Marshal reached into an inside pocket and removed a cigar; he bit off the end, picked up a match, held it at the top of the lamp chimney until ignited, then with the leisureliness of a man at a dinner table puffed on the cigar until it was burning well. He twirled a chair about and putting a foot upon the seat, leaned an elbow on his knee and looked at Nora.

She had dropped into a chair, and was nervously running her fingers through her hair, looking at the Marshal, at Buck, at the table, and she was shivering as if chilled.

"What," asked the Marshal, glancing backwards at Buck, "has she to do with this?"

"Ever'thing!" Nora said in angry excitement. "I know *who* you're lookin' for—an' it's not him there! He's not the man! He's *not* La Rue!"

The Marshal, a wise old hunter of evil men, knew by her tone, her manner, and its labored excitement, that she was desperately shielding this man who had called himself La Rue.

"So?" he inquired.

"Yes, *so!*" she almost shouted. "Nobody knew you was a Marshal until just now, but two days ago when you come in on the train the real La Rue, he was here in town—with Cunningham!"

At that moment Red spoke up to some one in the hall:

"You jus' git back there—an' stay! This here is private!"

"But I've got the right—" It was Barley's voice.

Red's gun came out and up.

"Git!"

"But I wanta—"

"Jus' you wait out there. We'll call yuh when you're wanted. This is pers'nel an' private. Git, you!"

Barley, cursing and grumbling, withdrew.

The Marshal had turned, listening to Red, and now spoke calmly—

"You boys do things pretty high-handedly, seems to me."

"Got to," said Red. "If you knowed what all they been tryin' to do to us on the Eighty-Eight—"

"Now, son," asked the Marshal, looking without friendliness and without anger at Buck, "just *who* are you?"

But Nora spoke up frantically, getting out her words to keep Buck from saying anything:

"The La Rue you want is out to Cunningham's! He killed an' robbed a woman postmistress down in Texas—that's why *you* want him. An' that's why he ain't dared let himself be known. That's why Cunningham claims the Eighty-Eight—La Rue has sold it to him. Not even Jim Barley knew that, though him an' Cunningham are pardners. Cunningham meant to put one over on Barley. That's—"

"But then who is this man?" demanded the Marshal a little impatiently. "That's what I have been trying to find out." He jerked his thumb backward at Buck, then turned and looked at Buck.

Buck shook his head, saying—

"No, I'm not La Rue."

"Well I knew that, first look at you—least not the La Rue I wanted. I know that other fellow. It was to me he confessed after the murder. He got away recent when some fellows they broke jail. He had used many names, but said his real one was La Rue—told me about his father owning a big ranch up here. We thought he might head back this way and kept our ears to the wires. Then we got word La

Rue had showed up, open and above board. That seemed mighty queer, but I came. Now I've been here two days, just listenin' and askin' questions, and mighty puzzled, for I *knew* the La Rue I'm after would not have gone around tellin' people who he was. More, he'd never have made any gun play like I hear folks tell of you. But I was countin' on riding out to see you tomorrow, anyhow. Now just who are you, son?"

"She'll sound like a lie," said Buck, "but the truth it is—"

Nora raised up, frightened; her eyes, her half lifted hand, her whole bearing, begged and warned him anxiously. The Marshal, through narrowed eyes, looked at her suspiciously, then turned, listening to Buck.

"Ol' La Rue robbed my father—they were cow pardners, most thirty year or more ago. Their trails crossed here in town, recent, just happen-so. When the smoke it cleared away, my dad he hears there is no heirs but this La Rue kid who is gone to —— knew where. Dad figgered, me having rights, I ort-a horn in on the ranch. I dyed my hair an' come. I found some women out there to the ranch, relations of ol' La Rue. It 'pears he meant them to have the whole ranch, an' said he'd left a will, the which ain't been found. That's all. I ain't fightin' no women, but as this girl here says, Cunnin'ham has for reasons I'd jus' put down to mean cussedness, been tryin' to grab that ranch."

The Marshal drew slowly on his cigar, then—

"But you told people you were La Rue?"

"Yeah."

"You signed some papers, I hear."

"Yeah. That was when I firs' come."

"Umm-m. You've got yourself into some trouble then, I reckon. But *that* has nothing to do with me because I don't bother official with anything that ain't my business. What was your father's name?"

"Boyd. Jack Boyd."

"Boyd! Jack Boyd o' the Border? Why, I s'posed Jack Boyd had settled into a grave long ago. He's hereabouts, is he son?"

"No," said Buck. "He ain't. You bein' a Marshal might want to know on account of things as happened before I was born. But he went straight an' took hisself another name an'—"

"Son," said the Marshal, meditatively, "anytime anybody wants Jack Boyd arrested for what he done would best look around for some man as wasn't down on the Border in the old days. It's true he shot an Army officer an' took to the hills. It's true he got some bad men as were bad an' done a lot of things he ortn't. But it's also true that onct when a bunch of soldiers were layin' behind their horses, top of a sand hill, no water and all the horses hurt or dead, and half o' the dozen soldiers shot or dead too, with greasers an' Indians closin' in—an' we had a little flag flyin' just to keep our spirits up—son, it's a fact that this same Jack Boyd, at the head of his outlaws, rode down like a sand storm, shootin' as they come an' a comin' —— forleather 'gin odds o' ten to one! An archangel out o' Heaven wouldn't a been more welcome. I was one o' them troopers. It's a fact Boyd had shot an' killed a major—but us soldiers didn't do no more mournin' over that major than was required by regulations. No, son. I'm lookin' for Laurence La Rue. I'm not lookin' for anybody that just calls hisself La Rue."

Nora was staring nervously; her lips trembled with questions that she dared not ask, and the anxious look in her dark eyes caused the Marshal to shake his head a bit regretfully as he turned aside and flicked the ash from his cigar, thinking—

"She's mixed up with him, somehow."

"Gosh!" said Red Clark explosively. "You mean Boyd come a-rescuin' solgers as had been sent out to catch 'im?"

"Yes. Just that. There was talk of a pardon an' all, but the Army men they said he'd have to come in an' stand trial first. An' he wouldn't do that o' course. But he sort of turned quiet an' dropped out o' sight. I did hear some years ago about somebody tryin' to arrest him for that old crime down somewhere in Oklahoma, I think."

"Yes," said Buck. "Me an' him rode off together. We been round in quite a few places, workin' here an' there. Then we drifted up here into the San Arnaz."

" 'Night," said the Marshal, putting out his hand. "I'm glad to have seen you."

EVEN while this conversation had been going on the little wires that ran into Perez by the side of the railroad had been click-clicking click-clickety-click click-click as operators, between official messages, passed

the news along that the Harrison gang had been wiped out up near La Junta while trying to rob a Santa Fé train.

The Marshal left the small room, returning to the saloon. He had not fully closed the door behind him before Jim Barley, hobbling recklessly, came through.

Nora had caught at Buck's arm to hold him, to talk to him, but Barley, stamping and thumping his heavy cane, came upon them.

"Yeah. Yore turn next," said Red. "Set you down."

Barley was sweating, angry, red of face. He bawled at Buck—

"You got me in a ——ova mess!"

Buck laughed at him, then Nora laughed with a kind of hysterical jeering.

Barley fixed his glare upon Nora and gestured at the door.

"Get out! Clear out o' my place! Clear outta town! You've throwed in with these fellers an' me payin' you wages!"

Nora's reply was sharp and blasphemous. Her anger was up. She tossed her head, called Barley hard names, squared her elbows and told him:

"You can take your wages an' go to ——! I stay right here till I'm ready to go. An' I tell ever'thing I know, the which is a lot!"

"I'm runnin' my place!" Barley shouted. "You go, now!"

He pointed dramatically with leveled cane toward the door.

"I *stay!*" said Nora, folding her arms. "I heard you an' Cunningham talk an—"

Barley swung up his cane, but Red caught it, jerked, pulled it loose, then threw it to the floor.

"The time for to beat up a lady," said Red, "is when they ain't no gentlemen around. The lady stays, don't she *Mr. La Rue?*"

"She stays," said Buck.

"La Rue!" Barley growled fiercely. "You've played ——, you have! Makin' people think you was La Rue! Don't you know Monk Cunnin'ham, he's got a bill o' sale to the whole —— ranch, signed by the real La Rue!"

" 'Pears to me I heard somethin' like that before," said Buck.

"She tell yuh?" Barley indicated Nora, but did not look at her.

"Yes, I told him!" said Nora.

"An' I tried to help *you!*" said Barley to Buck.

"You're a liar!" Nora answered flatly. "You wouldn't help anybody. You meant to cheat the Monk, an' he put one over on you. This real La Rue, he sneaked back into this country and made for Monk Cunningham to protect him—give away the ranch. Cunningham he couldn't say so to anybody because that would mean he had to explain—then La Rue would be grabbed. But you, Jim Barley, you an' Cunningham made it up. You know Cunningham means to kill him—" she indicated Buck—"then make the women leave the country because his bill o' sale won't be worth nothin' if that will turns up."

"You two in cahoots?" Barley demanded, looking from Nora to Buck.

"Some," said Nora defiantly.

"I been a fool," said Barley. "I tried to do right by you, an' you—you've put me in a ——of a hole—me identify in' you that way, legal!"

"Things they is done informal here, you said," Buck replied. "You can explain private to the jedge. Or if it 'll help you any, I'll go put a piece in the paper, explainin' to ever'body. I've been thinkin' some o' that."

"I been a fool to trust anybody," Barley complained. "Cunnin'ham he's got that bill o' sale right in his pocket an'—"

"He laughed at you," said Nora, and laughed herself. "He laughed at you when you, telling him as administrator you needed it, asked him to give it to you. I heard. I heard ever'thing."

"Who *are* you, where'd you come from, an' why?" Barley demanded of Buck.

"You'll know tomorrow, maybe. You got anything more to say to me?"

"You signed some papers, an' that there is forgery!" said Barley, looking ominous.

"Don't you worry, boy," Nora spoke up. "I heard him tell Cunningham that he, Barley here, would get them papers tore up because he had identified you as—"

"You must a-done a lot of over-hearin'!" Barley growled savagely.

"I did, an' it was funny! You're both crooked as a dog's hind leg an'—"

"Shut up, you!"

"I won't! I know so much I'll blow up if I don't talk an'—"

Barley cursed; he got up, hobbling about the room, then suddenly started out of the door; but Red stopped him with:

"Where you think yo're goin'? You wanted to get in, now stay!"

"Me," said Buck, talking to Barley, "how do you know but I'm an agent from the Cattlemen's Association, come in here to see about you an' Cunnin'ham?"

Barley stared with surprize and misgiving: "Are you a detecative?"

"I wouldn't be much of one if I told you so outright, would I? But I'm a whole lot more than you think for, Barley. Let him go, Red."

Barley went; and when he was out of hearing, Buck said with the air of decision: "I am goin' a-put it all in the paper, to-night. Then ever'body'll know the truth about Barley, Cunnin'ham, me!"

Nora caught hold of him, held him, looked at him tensely, asking:

"But you are—you are—are'nt you Buck Harrison? I'll never tell. I swear to God I'll never tell, but you are, aren't you?"

"Me? Whatever makes you think that o' me? My name it is Boyd—Buck Boyd."

LITTLE ADAMS was fretfully closing his last form for the hand press. He was tired, he had worked late and had a good paper. When the paper had been just about ready for the press, his friend the telegraph operator had sent word to come quick; and Adams had gone to the depot and heard about the Harrison gang being wiped out; that is, three men had been killed, two badly hurt and captured, but neither of the Harrisons were among those caught. It was now late.

He stopped his work and nervously stared at the doorway. Some one—more than one—was coming.

Buck, Red and Nora entered, with Red carrying a suitcase.

"Howdy," said Buck, cheerfully.

"Howdy-do?" said Adams, relieved but mystified.

"We want a piece put in the paper," said Buck.

"Too late. I'm sorry. I'm just locking the last form. What was it you wanted?"

"Somethin' tellin' what a —— skunk Barley an' Cunnin'ham is, an' some more folks like Slab Saunders. Then I want you to put in a piece about me—"

"Too late—too late," Adams protested anxiously with chills running up and down his back. "I wouldn't like to do it nohow. I'd get shot an'—"

"You would?"

"They wouldn't like it!"

"But it's the truth an' you can say I said it!"

"No I couldn't!" Adams cried. "They'd shoot me!"

"Coward!" said Nora scornfully, throwing off her cloak as if she meant to stay a while.

"An'," put in Red, sitting down on the suitcase in which they had brought Nora's belongings from the I. X. L., "yo're liable to git shot if you don't!"

"But the paper's all made up!" Adams explained in a tone of abject begging.

"Then we'll get out one of our own," said Buck. "You can put in the paper as how I made you do it, so it'll be all right."

"I can't! We don't put things like that in the paper! It ain't right an'—"

"It's truth," said Buck. "Don't you put what's so in the papers?"

"No!" Adams fairly yelled. "Not if I know it's going to hurt people's feelings!"

Buck looked a bit doubtful. He had never had any previous experience with newspapers, personally.

But Red spoke up:

"Then you are a pore editor. Down in Tolluco we got an editor who don't ever put in nothin' 'less it's to make somebody mad. He's got aw-burn hair an' is a jim-dandy, too. He's had quite some argyments over the pieces he's put in the papers, an' onct he was shot up so bad ever'body thought he was done for. But shucks, not him! He come out on crutches an' went on gittin' out his paper an' makin' folks mad. Only difference it made in him was that he went to packin' a scatter-gun along with his six-shooter when he'd go to the post-office after his mail, but soon as he was off them crutches he laid by the scatter-gun. He is a real editor."

"An' you 'll jus' put in what I tell yuh," said Buck, growing firm.

Adams begged and plead, but Buck was determined; and at last the sickly, scared editor took pencil and paper. He meant to do as many a newspaper man has done with a disagreeable news-bringer: He meant to write it all down, then throw what he had written away when the disagreeable one departed.

"All right," said Adams, sitting down, pencil in hand. The pencil quivered, his body trembled, his teeth would have rattled but he held them clenched.

Buck pushed back his hat and wet his lips. He could talk well enough but literary dictation had him rather confused.

"How'd we better begin?" he asked.

Red spoke up—

"Jim Barley an' Monk Cunnin'ham is hoss-thiefs, cow-thiefs, an' worser, an' Slab Saunders he works for 'em!"

"That's it!" Nora cried approvingly. "Then put in what I told you about them."

"Right," said Buck. "You write it like Red said."

"But I couldn't run that!" Adams protested, even though he had no intention of printing any of it.

"You're goin' to anyhow," Buck answered with a crisp tone suggestive of trouble. "An' I'm goin' stay right here, a-watchin' you, till I read 'er in the paper myself."

Adams made a confused gasping sound and sank back.

"Get some water," said Nora. "He's trying to faint."

Red snatched the dipper from the water bucket and promptly threw water over the editor's head. Adams sprang up, dripping and mopping his face; he begged, he cried, he tried to explain that such statements were never put into a newspaper.

"They are down where I come from," said Red.

Buck was not in the least impressed; what he wanted in the paper had to go, and he meant to stay right there until it was in.

"Jim Barley he owns this paper!" Adams wailed.

"So much the better," said Red. "Folks 'll b'lieve what it says about him in his own paper!"

"I'll be killed!" Adams wailed.

"Naw, maybe you 'll jus' be crippled up some for a time," Red suggested, encouragingly. "Like the Tolluco editor I was tellin' about."

"You fellows will have to help me get out of town!" Adams begged.

"You bet," said Buck. "When the train goes tomorror you can ride 'er."

"I can't wait for the train. I want a horse!"

"When we get it in the paper like we want, you 'll get yore hoss," Buck promised.

"My God, what's this!" Nora gasped, picking up a discarded proof from the floor. "The Harrison gang caught—killed—"

Buck swore and snatched at it, grasping it, bending forward, reading intently, stumblingly. Red pressed against his shoulder. But Nora watched Buck; she watched breathlessly, and with that nearly clairvoyant gift that some women have, that perhaps all have, she seemed almost to sense what he was feeling.

When at last he had finished and stood with the proof crumpled in his hand, looking thoughtfully at nothing, she laid a hand on his arm, pressed close to him, whispered:

"You didn't fool me! I *knew* you were Buck Harrison."

Buck looked at her doubtfully, suspiciously.

"Don't look at me thataway. I won't give you away. Not to any man on earth I won't!" She pressed his arm more tightly, saying softly, "I knew it all along—you ask Red if I didn't guess it that first night!"

"Yo're right," said Buck. "I'm sorry I lied to yuh a while ago, but a feller can't be too careful who knows about 'im."

Adams, over by the cases, had lengthened out his compositor's stick and with Red standing by, watchfully, was setting up what he had been told to set up. He was using a large font of type, and from time to time emptied the full stick into a galley; and when the galley was well filled he inked the type, dampened a piece of paper, laid this paper over the type and pounded it with a mallet on a small block of wood that he moved about over the face of the type.

Nora, Red and Buck would then crowd together over the wet proof and read, but there was no proof-reading. Misspellings passed practically unnoticed; all they were interested in was in telling harsh truths about Barley, Cunningham, Saunders, and in getting in the story of Jack Boyd and Buck, who had come to pass himself off as La Rue.

Adams thought of dodging out of the back door and running, but that thought did not encourage him to risk it; he thought of pi-ing the make-up but he was afraid of Buck, almost more afraid of Red who had taken a great interest in this edition.

"I never knowed bein' an editor was so much fun," he said, taking unto himself some literary pride as he gleefully read the galley proofs. His hands were inky, his face smudged where he had scratched thoughtfully in the labor of helping to think up things to put in the paper.

The front page form was locked and

Adams lifted it. For one wild fearful moment he meant to drop the form, but a glance at the eager intentness on Red's smudged face, the half smiling triumph of Buck's, caused Adams to bear the form more carefully than any form he had handled for a long time.

"You've got to get me a horse!" he said desperately. "You promised!"

"You'll git yore hoss when we git our paper," said Red.

The forms were laid on the press bed, locked into place.

Adams weakly pulled at the old hand press, feeding it a sheet of blank paper; the rollers crossed, and when the sheet was lifted, there in the paper, fixed permanently for all men to read, was the story of, not Buck Harrison but Buck Boyd—and the story of Barley, of Cunningham, of young La Rue. Statements were made with a bluntness of phrase that knew nothing of libel or fear of gun play.

"Here, let me do some o' that!" Red cried, and pushing Adams aside began to run the press. He got the paper on crooked and sometimes he missed the timing of the rollers, often he ran two sheets at once, and none of the sheets were printed on more than one side. It was joyful work for him, and he ground out paper after paper, while Nora and Buck folded them.

The ink was not given time to dry, they smeared the face of letters, they smeared their hands, but they worked excitedly, in triumph, while Adams, nervous, exhausted, shivered in a chair and fearfully watched the first gray light of dawn strike against the dusty windows of the little print shop.

Nora, speaking in a low tone, now again as she had repeatedly done that night, urged Buck to leave the country quickly. Her dark eyes glowed with an affectionate admiration, there was almost tenderness in her anxiety, as she said:

"They'll sure somehow find out who you are, then you won't have a chance to go. Don't be a fool, boy."

"I reckon I'll go—sometime. Yeah."

"It's because of *her*, that girl out there at the ranch, you're staying, ain't it?"

"In a way, maybe. Unh-huhn."

"If she knew, Buck, would *she* stand up for you?"

"Gosh, I don't mean to tell 'er, or nobody. 'Pears to me enough folks know."

"Too many!" said Nora earnestly. "I've known a long time. As I told you, there was *something* in the way you come into the saloon that night after Saunders that made me know. Something in your voice, in the way you carried yourself. Somebody'll find out—folks always find out. Then Aquillar'll get everybody he can find an' ride after you. Cunningham's men will come an' kill you. Go now, Buck. Don't go back out to that ranch."

"I've got to. Somebody there I gotta see."

"That girl?"

"Another feller."

"Who?"

"Oh a feller I got watchin' things."

"Who?" demanded Nora. "You're lying to me. It's that girl!"

"I ain't none much interested in girls. If Red there was a girl I'd shore marry him, you bet. But he ain't."

"Why? What has he done for you?"

"He's the sort o' —— fool I like, Red is."

"Don't you know everybody would say I am a —— fool too, throwing in with you this way?"

Buck answered uncomfortably:

"I reckon you are, too, but I'm mighty glad. What you goin' do now. You can't stay on here in town, can yuh?"

"Nobody'll hurt me. I'm not afraid, except for you."

"They better not!"

"Would you care?"

"They 'd sorta get the impression as how I did!"

"I'll stay here in town," said Nora, "but if I send word out to you—will you go? Just cut an' run, get away?"

"I reckon. I'm goin' anyhow, soon."

Red had run off all the papers. He came up to them grinning.

"What we goin' do now? Scatter 'em around the streets?"

From his chair in the corner, Adams called tremulously:

"It's daylight—you 've got to help me get out o' town!"

"Gosh if it ain't daylight," said Red. "Le''s be ramblin'. We'll go to the liver' stable, git him a hoss, git our own an' light out f'r home."

He and Buck picked up an armful of folded papers. Adams, having already got together a few small things that he wanted to carry with him in his flight, went outside the door and peered anxiously up and down the empty street.

Nora slipped on her cape, looked at the heavy suitcase, stooped to lift it, then let it remain and said nothing. No one else remembered her baggage; and she did not want it now. It would be cumbersome on horseback, and already she had the idea that she too was going on horseback.

As they went along the street Red joyously paused at doorways and left papers there; some he threw jubilantly. Adams would hurry ahead, begging them to come on, to hurry, then would return nearer to them as if he dreaded to be alone in the street.

Before the I. X. L. Red threw down a handful, saying—

"That feller Lynn he likes so to read, maybe he'll cherish one for a keepsake."

"Lynn's not a bad fellow," said Nora, without emphasis.

"He ain't my idee of a good un, neither," said Red. "He ain't got no humor."

"Come on, come on!" Adams begged.

X

EARLY as it was, many persons were already astir at the livery stable. The barn boss, as if still half asleep, was stumbling about, leading out horses, making a swipe or two with the currycomb to clean away the straw and dust that still adhered to the sides of horses which had been lying down.

Murdock was there, looking very ponderous. He held a Winchester in a scabbard under his arm, and wore two belts filled with cartridges, and a long old-fashioned revolver. He talked with the United States Marshal, who had arisen for an early start, meaning to ride to Cunningham's. A small girlish appearing Mexican boy loafed near the Marshal; the Mexican was to be the guide to Cunningham's.

Murdock and the Marshal had never met before, but each seemed to recognize the other member of the same brotherhood; they had been young men down on the Border, knew something of the same country, knew about the same men.

"Well," Red called, "you folks must-a knowed what was goin' be in the paper this mornin' an' got up early for to read! Here, have one a-piece!"

"We turned ed'tors!" said Buck.

"I want a horse!" said Adams, looking about him anxiously.

Murdock shook open the paper and read in a streaming headline:

THE TRUTH ABOUT SOME FOLKS.

"Get a hoss up for him," said Buck to the barn boss, and gesturing toward Adams.

"Ever'body's all in a hurry this mornin' 'pears like," said the barn boss surlily.

The Marshal and Murdock were reading intently, Buck loafed against a post, eying the Marshal, thinking of Cunningham and the fact that the Marshal was going there and was half minded to go along; and Nora, thoughtfully, with growing determination, was eying Buck.

At that moment there was the clatter of a hard ridden horse in the street; then man and horse at the gallop came through the wide double-door of the livery stable, passed the stalls, and on out into the corral.

The horseman was Slab Saunders. He pulled up savagely at the presence of so many persons where none had been expected; and there before him, least expected of all, was Buck.

There was no way out, no time to hesitate. Without a word Saunders yanked his horse broadside to Buck, drew his gun, swung low to one side and shot from under the horse's head—but he shot from a dead horse. At the first sight of Saunders Buck had flashed hand to hip, and with gun out, the muzzle hip-high, shot the horse through the head as Saunders lurched protectively to the off side. The horse, shot, reared convulsively, breaking Saunders' hold so that he pitched headlong, and as he fell Buck shot again. Then the horse dropped, toppling upon the dead man.

Buck slowly thrust the gun into his holster and looked a little shamefacedly from Murdock to the Marshal, who were silent.

"I hate to kill a hoss. It shore hurts me to kill a hoss. But I know that trick o' his too well—there 's no other way out. Why couldn't he 'a' stood up to it like a man!"

"He knowed better," said Murdock heavily. Then to the Marshal, "It had to come first meetin' between 'em. But if this here Saunders had knowed the boy was anywhere about, Saunders he wouldn't 'a' come. He'd 'a' crept up an' shot from acrost the fence."

The Marshal nodded gravely. It had been man to man, the quickest marksman had won. The affair had nothing in it that

touched upon his duties; but old Border-man as he was, he looked a little wonderingly at Buck, for the Marshal had never seen quicker gun-work and had for many years been of the opinion that the old time Border skill for fast and straight shooting had died out.

"Too danged bad," said Red Clark. "He never got no chanct to see the paper, an' we was perticular to say some things about him!"

The Marshal then eyed this young red-head questioningly; but Red had spoken without jeering and as if sincerely disappointed.

"I reckon," said Buck to the Marshal, "if you ain't got no objections, none, me an' Red here'll ride over toward Cunnin'ham's with you. I want a word pers'nel with him. Can we go?"

The Marshal looked at Murdock, looked inquiringly at Buck, glanced at Red, then back to Buck and spoke:

"I ain't quite shore as I ought to let you come, me bein' about work official, an' you having a quarrel personal with Cunningham. No, I can't take you with me, but—but if you've got it in mind to ride that way anyhow, this bein' a free country I ain't got no right to say where you ride. That is, least-wise, if you give me your word as how there will be no gun play till it seems necessary for me to speak up, an' I'm mighty reluctant to speak with a gun. Do you promise?"

"Shore do. My instinks they're peac'ble. Pop Murdock there knows than an'—"

"Yeah, timid," said Murdock impassively. "Take him along, Marshal. If you was to take my advice, you would take a dozen more like 'im. Cunnin'ham may be ugly an' not want to give that La Rue up."

"He *does* want to give 'im up!" Nora put in shrilly. "I heard him tell Jim Barley—with my own ears I heard him say he couldn't publicly claim the Eighty-Eight till folks knew about La Rue bein' out to his ranch. An' he hadn't let even his own men workin' there know yet that this was La Rue. Cunningham had promised not to let anybody know, but he never keeps his word!"

Murdock grunted vaguely, then:

"But Cunnin'ham's killers won't take it kindly for to see him give up a wanted man. Too many of them are wanted theirselfs. In this here country it has been un'erstood for a long time that any man as works for Cunnin'ham is safe from the sher'ff."

"This," said the Marshal quietly, tapping his breast, indicating the golden ægis of the United States that he wore above his heart, "is different. When I want a man, usual I go alone. But if it's a long ride, at times I don't mind company. Only remember this, I do all the talkin' an' whatever shootin' 'pears needful."

The barn boss had got out a horse and saddled it for Adams, and the little editor was trying to scramble into the saddle.

"Here," said Red, "I'll give you a lift. You're some edycated in word-work, but awful shy o' things a man orta know. Can't even climb a hoss or shoot folks as don't like what yuh say about 'em. You ain't fittin' to be an' editor anyhow. Which way are you ridin'?"

"To Blayton. I'm going there an' catch the train. I'm—I'm afraid I won't get out of town alive."

"Well, we'll give you a nice funeral if you don't," said Red contemptuously, helping the editor to feel bad.

Blayton was the first train stop East of Perez; not a town, just a place where the train, if flagged, stopped for passengers.

Without saying good-by, the editor rode off, bouncing and flopping in the saddle, kicking and clucking, urging the puzzled horse which lay back its ears indignant at such treatment. Adams rode through the stable and disappeared. He was never seen or heard of again in Perez.

Buck, Red, the Marshal and the Mexican boy mounted; and, as the others rode off, Buck reined up and said to Nora:

"You go to the hotel till train time, then go some'eres. I ain't likely to forget you, ever. Maybe some day we'll meet agin'."

He took off his hat and put out his hand.

Nora took his hand and smiled; she was disappointed, even hurt by such casual parting, but she showed nothing of this. Already she had made up her mind what she was to do, and meant that she and Buck would meet again, soon.

Buck rode off, galloping to join his friends.

Nora went to one side of the corral and looked after him for a time, then returned to where Murdock was placidly eying a big gray mare that the barn boss was saddling, a horse fully as large as the black upon which Red Clark had rode off.

"An' Jimmy," said Nora to the barn boss. "I want a horse too. Which way are you riding, Mr. Murdock?"

"Unh?" Murdock answered.

"Which way are you riding?"

"Over yonder a piece. I hear there is some antelope an' such game over near Jake's place. I used to like huntin'."

"Then I'll ride part way with you. I am going to the Eighty-Eight."

Murdock cleared his throat. His heavy face was expressionless, and from under drooping wrinkled eyelids he gazed at Nora; then—

"She's a long ride, an' I ain't goin' far yore way."

"We ain't got no lady-saddles," said Jimmy, the barn boss.

"I wouldn't set in one," said Nora. "I ain't no city girl. I was born in Texas. I'm going to the Eighty-Eight."

"You women are shore puzzlin'," said Murdock.

"I up an' quit Barley's place last night, an' I've got some good reasons for not wanting to stay on in town. That there—" she pointed to some of the scattered copies of the newspaper—"is some of them. I helped."

"But you are a woman."

"I know it, I reckon. An' women are always fools. You just wait till I get a horse too, Pop. We'll go part way together."

Murdock looked at her steadily for a time, but he said nothing more. Then he turned and eyed the body of Slab Saunders, now lying off to one side on some hay where it had been carried.

"I wonder," said Murdock, "what could have brought him to town in such a rush this mornin'?"

"Some deviltry," Nora replied sharply. "You can count on it. Cunningham an' him was up to something!"

Murdock fastened the Winchester scabbard to his saddle then, picking up a saddle bag, made it fast to the saddle which had just been put on Nora's horse.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Some grub an' a bottle o' water. You'll need a bite an' a swaller before the day it is over."

"Thank you, Pop. That's right obliging."

"Now Jimmy," said Murdock. "You lead this hoss over there to that wagon tongue an' I'll climb on. I reckon I'm gettin' too old for the range. Be goin' around in a buckboard next."

With much grunting and labor, Murdock crawled into the saddle on the big gray mare; he was fat and had got in awkwardly, but once in the saddle, he filled it solidly and sat at ease. He shifted the rifle a little to be out of the way of his leg, then pulled the holster with the long revolver around in front of him, grunted placidly and reined about, waiting for Nora.

Jimmy helped her into the saddle. Murdock gazed impassively at her, and as abruptly as if some one had just then whispered he realized that she was in love with that wild young fellow Boyd, who had called himself young La Rue.

"I'll be ——!" he grumbled.

"What you sayin', Pop?" she asked.

"That's it's time we be ridin'."

They rode off, walking until through the stable door, then touched their horses into an easy 'lope. As they went through the town they saw here and there a few men grouped together, newspapers in their hands; some laughed, some swore, all were excited.

For an hour or more Murdock and Nora rode side by side without speaking; every mile or so they pulled their horses into a walk, let them breathe, then again as if by common impulse went forward at the lope.

"Pop, why are you riding out?" she asked.

"Unh. I'm settin' here thinkin' the same o' you. Jake, I hear is havin' a little trouble. I'm ridin' down to see if he needs some help. I don't yet need no specs, an' my trigger finger it is still some soople. Onct I was right smart of a good shot, an' as long as I don't have to git out of a saddle I ride fair to middlin'."

"Pop, why does Jake put up with his wife's goin's-on with Cliff Hammarsmith?"

"Unh. I reckon he don't know no better."

"Don't know about them, you mean?" she asked.

"An' he loves 'er. I ain't up on love much. Women is queer critters."

"We *are*," Nora answered. "I've said often, we're like cows. Need to be roped, throwed and branded. You don't like *her*, do you?"

"Jake he is my friend. About the only one I got left, but enough for any man. Now if Jake he had a pet rattler an' liked that there rattler, I'd shore step sideways from it myself, but I wouldn't take it kind if anybody they hurt Jake's rattler, needless. Now why are *you* ridin' out?"

"From the time I was knee-high to a goose," said Nora, "I've been battered around. I've took some care of myself, but not enough to do me much good. Mack there in town, he's talked marryin' to me, which is consolin' to a woman old as I'm getting to be. For a time I thought onct maybe I'd do it, but I don't love him a-tall an' I don't hate him enough. So, not havin' any place much else to go, an' being as I quarreled with Barley, I'm going out to the ranch. I can cook a little, an' I'm going to try some honest work."

"You," said Murdock calmly, "are a-lyin' to me."

"Well, what if I am, Pop? A girl can't up and tell the truth to nobody when she ain't yet admitted it to herself. I'm just crazy-foolish, an' I don't like that Allen girl out there to the ranch."

"Unh-huhn, I reckon. But you don't mean no trouble, d'yuh?"

"No, but I want to see what she looks like. I ain't never seen her. I mayn't stay long, but I just had to go."

"Uh-huh," Murdock replied, then both were silent.

THEY rode on some miles farther; then Murdock pointed to where the road parted like a raveled rope:

"You go that way, an' keep goin'. You might tell the boys when they show up to look out f'r trouble. That piece in the paper is goin' to raise some ——."

"I mean to tell 'em!" said Nora almost triumphantly. "That is particular why I've come. Good-by, Pop—but say, don't you want a drink and a snack out of your lunch?"

"No, no thankee. An' good luck."

He waved a heavy hand in the gesture of friendly parting, spurred his horse and rode on.

CHAPTER X

THE BUCKBOARD

ABOUT two hours later Murdock, whose range-trained eyes did not, as he had said a little proudly, need specs, looked far ahead to where a tiny puff of dust rose behind a hill.

He pulled his horse into a walk and looked about him to see how much dust he had been kicking up. Not much, and what little there was had not stirred far from the ground.

"Unh," he grunted thoughtfully. "More hosses than one over there."

He was, he knew, in rather dangerous country. A range war was on; and it was almost certain that whomever he met would be a friend or an enemy. He was too well known and his friendship for Jake Spencer too well known, for him to deceive any of the Hammarsmith sympathizers. It they were friends, these people kicking up that far dust, all would be well; if they were Hammarsmiths, a meeting would mean a fight.

He opened and closed his right hand, trying the muscles.

"I'm a little slow now I reckon, but onct—" He sighed deeply.

Once indeed his slowness, for always he had been a slow, quiet, impassive man, had been deceptive; and there had not been many men who could draw so unexpectedly or shoot as accurately.

"Shootin'," he reflected, "I reckon it's like ridin'—once knowed, always purtty-good. But yuh can't keep on edge without keepin' at it. Me now, I don't allow I could hardly get back into a saddle without something to climb on."

The road was not much of a road; it had not been made by horsemen, but by freighters who once or twice a year pulled along it, taking supplies to the Spencer ranch.

Murdock rode on, slowly, watchfully. Whenever the road led to a hill top he would detour a little to keep out of sight.

"That there," he said to himself, "is a wagon comin'—a buckboard I bet. Now who'd be usin' of a buckboard? Maybe Jake's been hurt an' is bein' took to town. No, Jake he ain't much likely to get hisself jus' hurt. If he was too bad hurt to ride, he'd be kilt. Unh-huhn. Cunnin'ham he uses a buckboard, but it's too far south for him to be. Miz Spencer, she never rides hoss-back. Maybe it's her. Unh?"

Murdock rode on, carefully. He wished that he might dismount and wait, but he knew that he could hardly get into the saddle again. He thought about turning aside and waiting out of sight, but the thought did not appeal strongly. He was not given to turning aside to avoid trouble.

Presently he could tell that the buckboard was being driven furiously. As nearly as he could figure there were only two reasons for such wild driving: One would be to get

somebody to a doctor, the other would be because somebody was running off. Now, anybody that was fleeing would most likely be running from Jake Spencer's friends; therefore, reasoned Murdock, whoever was coming was most likely an enemy and to be treated as such.

As that bit of logic rounded to a conclusion in his mind he grunted deeply, relieved, like one who has solved a problem, and with a slow movement pushed up his hat brim, the better to peer ahead.

When, judging by the rise of dust, the buckboard was about a half a mile off, Murdock came to a bend in the road on a hill side. He backed his horse against the bank, rested his broad hands on the saddle horn, and impassively waited. His heavy face was expressionless, and his weary old eyes looked ahead with the untroubled steadiness of one who goes about his duty without fear, anger or hope. The big gray mare put forward her ears and lifted her head alertly.

"Steady, girl."

There was the crack of a whip, the high-pitched curse of a man's voice urging on tired horses, then the grind of wheels on the hard sandy dirt, and the buckboard with a man and woman on the front seat turned on the bend.

Murdock lifted his left hand. He struck the flanks of the gray mare and she leaped across the road, barring the way, and was pulled back on her haunches as the broncos settled back, slowing down.

The man in the buckboard was Cliff Hammarsmith; beside him, Lola Spencer. Hammarsmith half rose from his seat, jerkzing at the reins, peering at Murdock.

"Out o' the way there!" Hammarsmith cried. "We got to make the train!" Then suspiciously— "You, Murdock, what you want?"

Murdock sat heavily, filling the saddle, looking ponderous and slow, and his gaze appeared to be fixed steadily upon the woman who looked at him with surprize and guilty fright. Impulsively she cried—

"My mother is sick—I'm going for the train—I—I—"

Hammarsmith stood up, gathering the reins into one hand and lifting the whip as if to strike and make the horses go forward. Then he dropped the whip, simply letting it fall. Thus his hand became empty, his right hand. Murdock did not appear to notice, or even to be looking at him at all.

Murdock held the reins in his left hand, and the left hand was half raised. His right hand, palm down, rested on the saddle horn.

"I was ridin' out to see Jake, Miz Spencer," said Murdock slowly, heavily. "Where you reckon I'm most likely to locate him?"

"Why Jake he's—he's—Jake he's right there to home, or was when I left. My mother she is—"

Hammarsmith's hand had touched the front of his belt, then his hand stealthily moved along the belt to his hip, crept down, touched and closed on the handle of his gun—trying to sneak the draw on this dull, stolid, slow old man who did not seem to be watching. With a quick hard jerk, Hammarsmith cleared the holster—and two guns roared together, Murdock shooting across the saddle horn.

Hammarsmith, shot through the head, with a toppling headlong drop, fell from the buckboard, fell clear of the road and with tumbling flop and roll went down the bank.

Mrs. Spencer screamed and rose to leap. The broncos reared, plunging and trampling about, and the jerk of the buckboard threw her violently back into the seat.

Murdock had jammed his gun into its holster, struck the gray mare with spurs, and riding against the rearing bronco nearest the bank, reached out with a slow sure grasp and seized the check rein.

Heavily, calmly, he said:

"Whoa boy, whoa-o-o!" Then, "Pick up them lines, Miz Spencer. Whoa-o-o boy!"

Mrs. Spencer was moaning and tears ran down her cheeks, no longer pink with a rosebud's color. She gasped and sobbed, now hiding her face, now staring in fright at the big impassive man who repeated—

"Pick up them lines!"

She groped with shaking hands for the lines, and, her eyes almost blind with tears, drew the lines tight.

Murdock, still holding to the bronco's reins, spoke soothingly. With his free hand he patted the neck of the gray mare, assuring her that she was a good girl, that everything was all right. He took his time, lots of time, with the horses. It was as if he had nothing more to do that day than to quiet them. And when the broncos had settled down to a mere nervous trembling as they rolled their eyes wildly, he said:

"Now Miz Spencer, you hold 'em firm till I get off. If they bolt they may send

this here wagon over the bank. Whoa, boys, whoa-o-o."

Mrs. Spencer, though she held the lines in her hands, pressed her hands to her face and moaned. He looked at her for a time, but his expression was as blank as his palms. Unhurriedly, he again spoke to the broncos, and they seemed, though nervous, to trust him.

He drew a deep sigh, for it was ponderous work for him to get out of a saddle and an awkward sudden move might frighten the horses.

"Stand still now, girl. Whoa boys—whoa."

Slowly he pulled himself to one side of the saddle, and gripping the horn slid down.

"Jus' hand me them lines, Miz Spencer."

He held out his hand, and half blindly she groped to give them to him. Continuing to speak quietly to the horses, he climbed into the buckboard; then, just as if speaking to a person, said to the gray mare:

"You foller us, girl. An' awright now, you boys. Git up!"

The horses jumped ahead, struggling against the bits.

Mrs. Spencer moaned:

"Take me on—on to town. Thank God you're taking me on to town. Oh why, why did I ever do it!"

Murdock did not answer. He sat stolidly, looking straight ahead. When they had cleared the bend in the road and come to open level ground, he turned the horses in a wide circle and brought them back on the road.

"Oh—oh!" she cried. "You're taking me back! He'll kill me—Jake 'll kill me!" She caught at him, clutched him, begged, "Don't—oh, please take me to town! Oh, my ——, what will I do!"

Murdock did not answer. He appeared not to feel the clutching of her hands, but impassively as an idol which a frantic heathen woman implores, sat gazing ahead at the road. Only once did he turn his head, and then to see if the gray mare followed, and she was following.

Not once did he speak as they rode homeward, and Mrs. Spencer at last sank against the seat, huddled over, groaning, weeping, sighing, greatly fearing for her life. Now and then she broke out into wild laments over her folly and begged for mercy, but Murdock did not answer.

Along toward the middle of the afternoon they reached the ranch. She sat up, looking anxiously about. The bunk-house was deserted. All the men were away, most of them bunched at waterholes, throwing Hammarsmith stock off their range, shooting at Hammarsmith riders.

Murdock drove on past the bunk-house, on up to the house, and the Mexican girl came anxiously to the door and stood with fixed staring, wondering greatly.

Murdock stopped the horses.

"Git out, Miz Spencer."

WITH weak fumbling she started to climb out. The Mexican girl ran to her, reached up embracingly, but all the while staring fearfully at Murdock.

The women went into the house and disappeared within the shadowed doorway, but the voice of Mrs. Spencer reached him clearly:

"Oh I'll be killed — Jake 'll kill me! What can I do! Oh ——, I didn't want to go—I didn't!"

Murdock slowly, awkwardly, got out of the buckboard; then, patting the horses' necks, he took the halter ropes and tied them to a hitching rack. The gray mare had followed and stood nearby, indifferently switching at flies.

Murdock went to her, patted her. He took the rope from his saddle, put it around her neck and dropped the end of the rope on the ground. Then he took off bridle and saddle, laid the saddle in the shade, the bridle on the horn, and methodically he folded the blankets over the saddle.

He straightened up, looked slowly about him and out across the country; then unhurriedly he walked around the house and entered by the kitchen door.

The Chinaman had heard him coming, and jumping away from the door at which he had been watching the woman, pretended to be busy at the cupboard.

"Git yore traps," said Murdock. "You 're leavin'. *Pronto.*"

The Chinaman eyed him for a moment, then crossed his forearms, hands to elbows, nodded respectfully, and said:

"Les, Bossy. Les. Lite away, Bossy."

Murdock with a heavy, flat-footed slowness then stepped from the kitchen into the next room. Mrs. Spencer was in a rocking chair, weeping; the Mexican girl was on the floor at her feet, her arms about the wretched

woman. The girl, as Murdock came in, got to her feet and with frightened staring watched him.

"Git yore traps, girl. You 're leavin'. *Pronto.*"

"No, oh no—don't take 'Nita!" Mrs. Spencer begged. "Let *me* go—oh—'Nita don't go—don't leave me—oh!"

"Git yore traps!" Murdock repeated.

The girl glanced nervously about, then rushed from the room.

"What are you going to do with *me?*" Mrs. Spencer cried. "Oh you are cruel—oh please—I am a woman— Oh my ——, have mercy! What—what *are* you going to do to me? Oh Jake, Jake—please—he will kill me!"

She sprang up, coming at him with arms out; tears dripped from her cheeks, and her face was streaked in places where tears had dried so that her face looked scarred.

"Oh let me live—oh I'll be a good woman —oh please—live—good—"

"Set down," said Murdock, and wearily she returned to her chair.

Murdock fumblingly drew a cigar from his pocket, bit at the end, put the cigar into his mouth and absently groped about his pockets for a match, but not finding one he seemed to forget and puffed at the cigar as if it had been lighted. He walked to the doorway, filling it with his bulky body, and looked about carefully, as far as he could see over the country.

The Chinaman came with a small bundle. He wore a low-crowned stiff-brimmed hat. Putting the bundle down, he squatted on the ground beside it, waiting patiently, unquestioningly.

'Nita re-entered the room with a shawl over her head and a straw suitcase in her hand. She dropped the suitcase and rushed to her mistress, hugging her, and wept too.

Murdock, stooping slowly, with effort, picked up the suitcase, carried it to the door, dropped it, and said to the Chinaman:

"Put it in the wagon there." Then, to the Mexican girl, "I want you to git goin'. Come on."

She came humbly, wiping her eyes with the end of her shawl. Murdock walked on ahead of her to the buckboard and paused, waiting. She came. He helped her up. "Git in," he said, and the Chinaman climbed up beside her. Murdock picked up the lines and put them in 'Nita's hands.

"I reckon you 'd better drive, miss. Drive careful. Go to town. Put this rig up in ol' Hendryx's stable. If any Hammarsmiths come in, tell Hendryx he can send it out by them. It's a double H outfit. He there—" jerking a thumb toward the Chinaman—"won't talk. An' less yuh want Mrs. Spencer to git killed, you won't."

He untied the halter ropes and led the tired horses around, headed them on the road and stepped back. They started off.

Murdock stood for a time watching the buckboard, then again looked carefully about in all directions. No one was in sight. He pushed back his hat, rubbed his bald forehead with his palm, took the cigar from his mouth, gazed at it, tossed it aside, and re-entered the house.

Mrs. Spencer sobbed bitterly. She was terrified by the methodical slowness of this big awkward man, Jake's friend, Jake's best friend.

"How does it come, Miz Spencer, they ain't nobody about? Jake he wouldn't a left this ranch with no men folks by to look after you. Where are they?"

She groaned and wrung her hands, refusing to look up at him, but sobbed:

"I sent them over to Rocky Mesa. I said they'd better ride there. Oh, God help me!"

"You knowed Cliff was comin' an' you got 'em outta the way. Unh-huhn. I see. I didn't think Cliff Hammarsmith 'd have sand enough to come right in here after you. He liked for to meet yuh around where there weren't no Arrowhead boys."

"I didn't want to go! Honest to ——! I didn't think he would come! I said one day, 'If you want me you've got to show it by coming right here to the house, alone!' Oh, ——, I didn't think he would come. Oh— Oh, but I did send the men away!"

"An' Cliff he was afraid I reckon to drive back down toward his range, scairt he might run into some o' Jake's boys. So he was a-takin' you toward town. Unh. A fine feller to run off with. Unh."

"Jake will kill me! I know he will kill me! What will I do, what will I do?"

"An' ever'thing Jake's got is for you when he dies, an' he's out there fightin' to hold it agin them Hammarsmiths. Bad lot, them boys. Cliff he tried to sneak the draw. Them kind would steal a man's wife. Unh. Now Miz Spencer, you lissen to me. I figger one trouble is you've had too much help hereabouts. You ain't had

nothin' to do, bein' waited on hand an' foot. You've had too much time for to set in front of a lookin' glass an' think how young an' purtty you are an' how old an' ugly Jake is. Well, from now on you've got to work some—"

She sprang up, her tear-daubed face ablaze with wild hope:

"You won't tell him! You don't mean to tell him? Oh promise me—I'll be good—I'll be good! You won't tell him?" She gazed at him, doubting, hoping, straining to hear.

"I don't allow to tell him nothin'," said Murdock slowly. "But I allow to tell *you* some things. From now on you are to cook f'r Jake, an' make his bed an' sweep his house. An' when they ain't no cook down there to the bunk house, you are to pitch in an feed them riders. You ain't to have no more Chink men an' greasers waitin' on you. You can tell Jake as how you wanta do all the work yoreself, an' you ain't goin' coax him into lettin' you take no more trips back to Kansas. You're goin' work like women they ort to in this country."

"But he'll find out—he'll learn—and oh what will I do?"

"Jus' quiet down a spell. He ain't goin' find out nothin' as long as you ack right. Nobody'd dare walk up an' tell him, an' if I hear anybody talkin' around I'll tell 'em to stop it. For all Jake's ever' goin' a-know, me I jus' met Cliff on Jake's range an' shot 'im. Folks 'll make guesses an' they'll make guess purt-near right, but they won't tell them guesses to Jake. If they dared they'd have told Jake long ago how you an' Cliff was a-carryin' on. It was well knowed."

Mrs. Spencer clutched at him embracingly, sobbing thanks, swearing that she would be a good woman, that she would work her hands clear to the bone, vowing that her gratitude would be great always.

"I ain't doin' this for you," said Murdock heavily. "It's for Jake. You an' me ain't friends an' won't ever be. But he would be all broke up if he knowed. Them boys'll be comin' in soon from Rocky Mesa I reckon. You might stir around an' have supper het up for 'em. You can tell 'em you've been cryin' so much, worryin' over Jake—afeard he might get shot by a Hammarsmith. Me, I'm ridin' down toward where the trouble is. That's what I come for."

Blindly she held to him, thanking him, promising, weeping. She had expected death and had been given life; and in hysterical tears she slipped abjectly to her knees, groveling in the humiliation of frantic gratitude.

Murdock stepped back, pulling loose; then without a backward glance toward the huddled sobbing woman he walked from the room.

CHAPTER XI

RED WONDERS

THE Marshal, Buck, Red and the Mexican boy had not gone far on their way toward Cunningham's ranch when Red Clark lost his gaiety like a man who has sobered suddenly; and he fell into an uneasy meditation. His thoughts became so troublesome that at last he touched Buck's elbow and signed for him to drop back.

"What's matter?" asked Buck.

"Me," said Red, "I'm a powerful good hand for to think o' things I ort 'a' thought of before it's too late—like now."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Me, I'm scairt to go to Cunnin'ham's. I'm easy scairt I reckon, but bein' scairt don't allus do me much good, like it ort to. Like now. 'Cause if you go, I'm goin' too. Am I makin' myself plain?"

"About as plain," said Buck, pretending not to understand, "as if you was talkin' Chactaw."

"Well lissen. Us ridin' in behind the Marshal ain't goin' help us none. Cunnin'ham's got a pile o' men out there that would sooner plug us than anybody."

"So you're scairt?" Buck asked, grinning a little.

"Don't you think a feller ort a be?"

"Well what you want a do?"

"That's jus' it! There ain't nothin' to do, I reckon, but go on. If I backed out I would allus have myself sayin' to me, 'Unh-huhn, Red, onct you turned tail an' run 'fore you was hurt, so I reckon you ain't much good.' I don't like to have myself talk that away to me. It hurts my feelin's. But fac's they is fac's, an' it is a fac' that try hard, I can't see how we could be bigger fools than what we are doin' now. If you know of anything soothin' to remark, remark 'er now, 'cause I'm thinkin' o' home an' mother an' a-wonderin' do good cowboys git hosses to ride up there, or jus' have wings."

"I've heard some scairt men talk in my

time," said Buck tolerantly, "but I never heard any talk like you. Usual, them as is scairt the hardest says they ain't scairt a-tall, but they jus' got common-sense."

"Me, I ain't got no sense o' any kind. My father, the which was sher'ff, was thataway too. When he rode out after a man or men, the scairter he got the harder he'd push on, 'cause as he said to me onct: 'Son, I'd sooner kick the bucket than have to live with myself when I was ashamed of myself.' He was a medytative man, like me. Onct when he was scairt like that he come up on the camp o' four hoss thiefs, all settin' around the fire with guns on an' rifles clost by. Dad he looked through the brush an' a-wished he hadn't found 'em, 'cause he knowed they was bad, an' they would git him first pop if they tried. But he wouldn't turn tail 'cause he said to me afterward he knowed he wouldn't never have no confidence in hisself agin if he did. So he steps out an' speaks quiet-like. Ever' man jumps up, star-grabbin'. Humble-like they turns their backs an' let dad take their guns an' tie 'em up. 'All right,' they says to dad, 'bring in yore posse outta the brush.' 'I'm it,' says dad. An' yuh ort-a heard 'em cuss. They'd figgered men was all about 'em, clost around their camp, holdin' a bead an' jus' achin' to pull down at the first move. They figgered no sher'ff would a-stepped on 'em 'less they was covered by men as *wanted* to shoot 'em. So jus' by bein' plain scairt my dad he done what it was thought no man could do. I ain't no such man as my dad but we are relations. Only me, I've got to get all het up afore I can be brave. If I git mad enough I ain't scairt o' nobody, but right now I ain't mad a-tall. I'm jus' thoughtful an' talkytive."

"You're shore a funny kid," said Buck half admiringly. "Now me, I do my thinkin' 'fore I start somethin'. It's a habit I got. Then startin', I sorta forget what trouble there is liable to be, 'cause if you get thoughtful you're liable to scare yoreself. Now me, I've learnt some things as help a lot, the which is as how it's nearly allus safe to do what nobody expects yuh to do. Just like when yore dad stepped out on them hoss thiefs, jus' like when I rode t'other night over to Wild Hoss an' jumped them fellers. Jus' like now, ridin' in on Cunnin'ham. You forget, kid, that for all the —— we've raised in this here country we ain't been in 'er long—jus' about a week an' there ain't many folks out on the range as knows us by sight. Lissen an' I'll tell you somethin' reassurin'. When Saunders dropped there in the corral, I was ready for to go, 'cause there ain't nobody else there as knows us. Cunnin'ham wouldn't let them fellers, Windy an' his crowd, come to his ranch an' stay—he said they wasn't to show their faces to him till after they'd made good. The which makes us safe-strangers, just a-ridin' in. Now I reckon you feel better?"

"No. Nope. I'm still scairt somethin' will be wrong with yore figgerin'. But I'm willin' for to take the chanct. Now what, yuh reckon Slab he come to town for in such a hurry?"

"I never waste my time," said Buck, "thinkin' where thinkin' won't do no good. It's too much trouble. But Slab, him not bein' one o' them as we'd run off the Eighty-Eight like we'd done Windy an' them fellers, Cunnin'ham didn't know what a real coward he was. Slab, bein' accomplished thataway, I reckon he lied enough about the trouble he had with us there in Perez that first time we met for to make Cunnin'ham still have some confidence in him—now who's this here comin'?"

They looked ahead and saw three men cutting across the country so as to meet them upon the road; and as the men drew near thay saw that all were Mexicans and that one was Sheriff Aquillar.

The sheriff reined up and said, "Good day, señors."

The Marshal said, "Howdy." Being an old Border man the Marshal did not have much respect for Mexican officers, and so was uncommunicative though in a reserved way pleasant.

Aquillar, in his serious staring way, eyed Buck and Red questioningly, but no one explained anything to him; and Aquillar said that he was on his way back to town after having gone out the day before to look for a Mexican who had stolen some horses from the "two señores here"—he indicated the men with him. No, they had not found the thief.

Aquillar and his friends then rode on toward town, and the Marshal with his companions rode on toward Cunningham's.

TO BE CONCLUDED

BEAVER! BEAVER!

by Faunce Rochester

TO MENTION the fur trade is to call up for the average reader's consideration the Upper Missouri outfit, the activities of the parent company, the American Fur Company, and the latter's subsidiary company, the Pacific, at Astoria, and the free-lancing of the Rocky Mountain Fur company and various other independent outfits. As a matter of fact the fur trade in the New World dates back to the coming of the first explorers. Sir Humphrey Gilbert reports, "There are in these parts most delicate and rare furres." One reason for "planting English colonies upon the North partes of America" are the "martins, beavers, foxes, black and white."

One of Raleigh's followers, Thomas Heriot, wrote in 1586, "Along the sea coast there are great stores of otters which will yield good profit."

In 1614 Captain John Smith visited Monhegan island off the coast of Maine, and boasted that "for trifles" he secured "nearly 11,000 beaver skins, 100 martin, and as many otters, the most of them within a distance of twenty leagues." Undoubtedly John was as carefree of his morals in securing a shipload of furs for nearly nothing as is the modern man in stealing oil-lands. What is now Maine has never been touted as a great beaver State, and yet in ancient times this northeast chunk of the U. S. furnished peltry in prodigious amounts. In the middle of the eighteenth century Bering, the Dane, serving Russian czars, drove a mighty trade in sea otters on the Pacific coast. Long ago the sea otter became practically extinct. The Upper Missouri and the Columbia river basin were almost unknown to white men until after the beginning of the nineteenth century. The trade in buffalo robes on the eastern slope of the Rockies was not developed until well into the nineteenth century. For two hundred years immense quantities of furs were taken from America without touching the Columbia basin or the eastern slope of the Rockies. These two rich locales figured not at all in the long fight begtween France and Great Britain for supremacy in the fur trade. Although early in the New World, and after furs, the French were tardy to penetrate west of the Mississippi and the Great Lakes. The French and Indian wars held up exlporing expeditions for many years. In 1670 the Hudson's Bay Company had a monopoly in the fur trade in the Hudson's Bay basin, then called Rupert's Land. After the last French and Indian war Scotch and English traders, operating from Montreal, began a fierce rivalry for the Great Lakes trade. Alexander Henry was the first of these to venture beyond Lake Superior. At this time the trans-Mississippi country was unexplored. Competing traders began to use rum to stimulate the Indians to greater efforts. The result was directly contrary to what was expected, and the price of furs reached undreamed of figures. "Hijackers" in peltries appeared. Traders were robbed with violence. Many merchants failed. The Hudson's Bay company was forced to develop the western country when the Northwest company took the field. The latter company had an agent in the Mandan villages on the Upper Missouri when Lewis and Clark were there. More than two hundred years elapsed between John Smith's profitable dickering at a Maine island and the decline of the beaver trade in the Northwest. Then the American developed the Upper Missouri and Rocky Mountain fur trade and produced Manuel Lisa, the two Chouteaus, an Ashley, a Bridger, Kenneth McKenzie and an army of other sturdy, indomitable men, who added the name "Mountain Men" to our vocabulary. The trans-Mississippi fur trade had its beginning after the return of the Lewis and Clark expedition. The fur trade in North America began more than two centuries prior to that date. Whether the Norsemen procured furs at a much earlier time I have no record, but I assume that they did.

Gray Ghost

by F. St. Mars

Author of "Wild Gas," "Swallowtail," etc.

THOSE few people who had scraped an acquaintance with Gray Ghost would have described him to you as a fiend, which was obviously untrue, for he was a Canadian lynx—which some believe to be the same thing.

In appearance he was mostly long, furry legs and huge, padded feet; mottled gray and white was his color; thirty-three inches was his length, and there was also an absurd bob-tail of five inches; tufted grotesquely were his ears; inscrutable were his green cat's-eyes and diabolically cruel was his bearded face. For the rest he was a feline of the felines—furtive, self-absorbed, silent and mysterious.

Why he had been trapped in the Adirondacks and sent, caged and swearing, to England is of no concern. Nor does it matter why the train that rattled him through England collided—not gently—with another train and shot him, cage and all, out into the night and into a wood. What is of concern is that the cage split, walnut fashion, against a pine trunk and delivered Gray Ghost, spread-eagled and spitting, free and unhurt to live in a new wild.

Gray Ghost rolled over exactly four times in the undergrowth and the pit-like blackness and then removed. He was scandalized at the noise, for cats—and he was by design a cat—hate noise; and when two good trains meet at thirty miles an hour, they say so in something above a whisper.

A quarter of an hour of prodigious bounding brought him to silence, the awful, prim silence of an English country night, and he stopped. He prospected his body and limbs with his nose, which reported no injuries. He cleaned himself, because he was a cat, and then he sought a sacrifice.

Instantly his manner changed. He became a shadow merely, silent as a smoke puff, a drifting something, a gray ghost, soundless and uncanny. Only his unfathomable eyes showed with their yellow-green fire and their chilling expression of an unquenchable hatred. Heaven knows where they got that expression from; it is in the eyes of all the cats.

Across a field he went, sliding—there is no other word for it—on his belly through the mist, showing no more than a patch of thicker mist himself. For which reason, perhaps, the giant tomcat, who ought to have been home instead of poaching rabbits, did not hear him coming. He was stalking a buck rabbit, was that cat—a smudge, half seen, half guessed, in the mist.

He got within spring. He sprang. Then he rolled over sideways and screamed because a thing, a big half white, half gray thing, which was like a cat and yet not like any cat that he had ever seen, flew past over his back and hit him on the cheek. It sprang for the rabbit, that thing, even as the cat had done, but its spring was no mere jump as the cat's was; it was a long, grand leap, and it reached that rabbit. A pitiful, child-like squeal announced the fact, and thereafter was silence, just silence, and Gray Ghost crouching low over the dead bunny.

That cat knew nothing about lynxes, which was a pity for the cat. He knew only that he was the biggest cat thereabouts, and he gave ground to none. This may explain, perhaps, why he shot straight at Gray Ghost, screaming like any fury, wide-jawed, wide-eyed, wide-clawed, but hardly, I fancy, wide awake.

What happened then is not clear. None of the wild folk—and there were many watching—are quite certain. They saw what might have been a whirl of something—mist or fur or grass. They heard sounds that few men hear. There was a flicker of greeny-yellow eyes and white fangs, like the flicker of light on swords at a duel.

Also they believe—being wild folk they could smell blood—that some thing or things fought. This they deduced as well from the fact that twenty seconds later there was a very dead cat on the ground and a lynx melting into the mist—they could just see his bob-tail bobbing. But there was no rabbit—that had presumably accompanied the lynx.

Three hours later, just as the cold grayness of dawn began to reveal the doings of the secret night and the twigs shimmered against the breath of the dawn wind, Gray Ghost might have been seen, uneasy and furtive, seeking himself a lair.

Before sunrise all the night hunters must be in hiding for the day. It is a law, and he who breaks it may break it once or even twice, but he is hardly likely to live to break it a third time. Day is death to the prowlers of the dark hours, and Gray Ghost knew it. He climbed into a giant gnarled oak, knotted and twisted as are all the very aged. He stretched himself along one big limb and, hidden from the ground and fearing naught from above, went to sleep. The next thing he knew was waking to the sounds of a small-sized riot, followed by the shattering concussions of guns, many guns. He flung himself on to his great, padded feet, ears pressed hard down, fangs bared—snarling, wild-eyed, and dangerous.

He saw and heard—the trees and air were full of them—dozens of pheasants mounting into the sky on whirring wings and dissolving suddenly downward in bursting puffs of feathers. He beheld men, many men, beneath him—*tap-tapping* with sticks on the underbrush in a manner calculated to drive any wild thing—and especially a cat—mad.

Then, because he was frightened or only just awake or both, he came out of that tree in one flying leap and with a scream as of a fiend in torment.

It was Gray Ghost's misfortune that he found himself in the middle of a pheasant drive; right above the line of beaters, in fact. If anything were needed to make it worse, he was also at what is known as the "warm corner" of the wood.

Pheasant shooters in England do not look for Canadian lynxes at their drives as a general rule, you will understand. A stray fox or maybe a cat is their biggest kind of surprize. Therefore, when Gray Ghost made his bow, his first bow before the British public, that same British public must needs stand still and gasp. They were out of their reckoning, so to speak, and when they had quite made up their minds that whatever he was—and they knew no more than a baby what he was—he ought to be killed, he had vanished.

It was a case of now you see him, now you don't! for of all beasts the lynx is almost unrivaled in the art of vanishing into its surroundings in quick time. This beast had no delusions, and he was taking no chances. He went in one bound, and the shadows hugged him to their bosom and he simply was not.

It was three of the clock when Gray Ghost gave the pheasant shooters something to talk about for the rest of their lives and it was nine at night when he stumbled up against a sheepfold. There was the smell—an oily, sweet smell—of sheep in the chill air, and the haze of their breath rose up against the moonlight. This he viewed from the wood; and he was hungry.

The ground, the trees and all still things were of frosted silver in the dead, cold glare of the unwinking moon; also, it was very cold. Gray Ghost had come, however, from where cold is a mighty name, and this weak English frost troubled him not in the least. He sank to the ground and watched as a cat watches for a mouse—one, two, it may have been three hours. So does a man-eater watch a camp-fire before delivering the dread spring. Then he moved out into the open.

It was no manner of walk, his stalk; a snake could not have slid flatter. Was there a tuft of grass, he used it; was there a loose clod, he lay behind it for minutes together; was there a shadow behind a rise

in the ground, he took advantage of it. A man watching his approach keenly might have been able to pick him out from his surroundings, but I doubt it. And all the time the sheep lay behind their hurdles, asleep or chewing the cud.

There was a bound of something gray in the moonlight, and the lynx was crouching flat within the fold. Half a dozen sheep scrambled to their feet and stood staring with that stupidity known only to sheep and rabbits. Otherwise there was neither movement nor sound.

Then came another bound of something gray, and one of the sheep blundered, bleated one short bleat and fell forward on its nose, coughing. The gray thing was on the woolly one's back, and it was the lynx. In a few seconds the sheep gave an exhausted sigh and was still. It was quite dead. Followed a rush of small hoofs, as the remainder of the flock bunched together helplessly in a crowd. There was trouble in that crowd, murmurings and bleatings and much helpless, weak outcry, and Gray Ghost, crouching above his kill, snarled wickedly at the uproar.

Then, swift and deadly silent, a long, blue shadow slid down the outside of the hurdles, heaved itself over them, and fell upon Gray Ghost without saying anything at all. It was an old English bob-tailed sheep-dog when it began that fight. When it had finished it might have been a—well, a ragbag.

Then Gray Ghost went away in a hurry, because a man ran out of a hut and flourished a crook and said shocking things and called upon another blue fiend—that must have been asleep somewhere—to come and help him. Gray Ghost, however, had dealt with one dog because he had to, but it would not be his fault if he faced two, so he removed.

His flight was like the flight of all cats, a series of great bounds. It was in no wise a run or a gallop. But he got along. There was speed. And a keeper coming through the wood rubbed his eyes and marveled.

In some fashion, about the great, furry legs and the abortive tail, he was like the sheep-dog that flung along at his heels. But sheep-dogs don't bounce, they run. For a moment, however, the likeness served.

The keeper raised his gun and lowered it again. He was uncertain, for lynxes were not his reckoning. And Gray Ghost saw the movement. He did not pause or stop, nor did he hesitate. To do so meant disaster from the blue, dumb terror at his heels. He spun, in mid-air he spun, half round, and—was not. He had simply bounced into nothing, like a spook—vanished.

An inky smother of bushes lay to the right of his path. He may have sprung in there. The dog said he had, but that dog hunted by sight; his nose was untrained. Therefore the bushes baffled him.

Certainly he could not see Gray Ghost there and, hide as the lynx might, the dog must have seen him, for he turned the place upside down, much to the disgust of several rabbits and the keeper, and came out again still dumb.

Then man and dog retired into the night and, after a due pause, Gray Ghost slid down out of a tree and went away in a hurry lest worse befell.

Over the silvered stillness of the silent fields this beast from the western world slid, and only his shadow was visible. So noiselessly went he that a hare asleep, or at least as much asleep as a hare ever permits itself to be, in its form heard him not. He caught its taint and froze.

A filmy green haze drifted across his luminous eyes, a tenseness crept into his limbs, his ears flattened. Otherwise he made no sign. Only he lay like a dead thing. Then, quite suddenly—so suddenly that a white owl who was watching him from a neighboring tree jumped and screeched—he sprang. Upward and forward he shot; and his shadow went with him.

It was the shadow that did it. The hare opened one eye, saw the shadow and removed two yards in one second. There was no perceptible interval between the opening of the eye and the removal. In the wild it is wise to jump first and inquire the reason after. The hare knew that. It was of no concern what cast the shadow; sufficient only that there was a shadow, and presumably something made it. She went.

Have you ever seen the going of a jack-rabbit? Well, they don't crawl, they get. That hare was in no sense a jack-rabbit, but she was a fair second. It was not so much the going of her as the fact that she was gone that would have amazed a watcher had there been one. There was a hare there one moment and the next there wasn't. Certainly a brown streak went off

into the night after the manner of a rocket.

Then Gray Ghost did a foolish thing. It is a thing to which lynxes are particularly prone. He lost his temper.

To lose one's temper in the wild is unwise. At the best it is expensive and at the worst it is unhealthy.

Standing there with his naked claws dug into the hare's form, he screamed with rage—a malignant, awful yell. There was hate in that yell, hate and all manner of other passions such as are not often heard outside a dream.

And a figure in the next field, a figure walking away that had not seen the lynx, stopped and spun upon its heel as if it had been stabbed in the back. And that figure was a keeper, another keeper. He said nothing, for he knew nothing of lynxes. He knew only, by the awfulness and unfamiliarity of that yell, that he was on the eve of a discovery.

He crawled on all fours to the hedge and peered across the shaven face of the field. He picked out the great cat standing motionless, a dim, half-guessed shadow in the fickle light. Then a cloud fell athwart the face of the moon and put out the light.

The keeper, waiting, humped up in the blackness, crouched with his gun raised ready for the moon to come back, for he lay within easy range of this unknown beast who had for speech the shriek of an untamed devil. Then the moon shook herself free and the cloud shadow went sliding away across the field. But no shot shattered the quiet.

The man, eager, bent, excited, stared and stared, and his face went blank. Gray Ghost had gone.

It was very still and, when the slow, creeping cloud shadows came, very dark. The man remained. He had an idea that perhaps the thing would reappear as cats often will, creep back again or show slouching across some open space.

For ten minutes he waited, and during that time a feeling crept up his spine and made his hair sit up, a feeling of being watched. He felt convinced in his own mind that the lynx neither saw nor smelt nor heard him before the cloud came. It had not moved then, not crouched even.

But he forgot one single fact—he was good at woodcraft, too—he forgot that a gun barrel raised in the moonlight throws a bar-like gleam. Yet how was he to know that one night in the Adirondacks a year before Gray Ghost had seen such a gleam and a bullet had sung past his ear a second later; moreover, he had not forgotten.

The keeper went home, and every step of the way his spine and hair crept together. He was unhappy. Twice he spun upon his heel and surprized—nothing! There were certainly shadows—the moon had seen to that—and they moved, but he was no suckling to be frightened.

He had seen them before. Nearly all his life, in fact; but this unknown beast and the equally unknown feeling he had not met before. He linked them together, coupled them up, yet he knew not why. That, unless I have made a blunder, is instinct; at least, it is instinct as we know it in the wild, instinct casting back Heaven knows how many thousands of years. He felt that he was being stalked, that man; which is the unpleasantest feeling I know.

Once, just before he entered his cottage, when he ran back suddenly upon his own tracks, he thought—it may have been mere fancy—that he saw something, a spook or a gray ghost, perhaps, which faded out among the trees as white steam dies on the air. And again, ten minutes after he had gone indoors, his chained-up dogs out in the yard set up a sudden, maniacal raging that was apparently quite uncalled for by anything visible to the eye.

Then began a war. On the one side the lynx, superperfect master of woodcraft; and on the other side, the keeper, plus gun and trap who knew not the name of the beast he hunted.

The days found Gray Ghost cradled high in the gnarled embrace of some ancient oak. The nights—ah! The nights were a different matter.

There had been peace smiling over the face of that country before he came, not after.

The pheasants, roosting high by night, never knew when his unseen paw might slash them into oblivion. Sheep, lambs rather, of that year that had been hurdled, and safe as a regular tax-payer in the times before, were now liable to be found by the shepherds dead and stark in the relentless, cold light of dawn. Hares that could hear the stalking creep of a fox a yard away, heard not the new, ghostly shape that snatched them out of their forms into eternity.

Many human eyes and the gaping barrels of not a few guns were turned in the direction of the mysterious, lowering woods as night swooped down, but never an eye saw the foe; none could describe it. Only the keeper knew, and he held his tongue.

One night, when the owls were mocking, as fiends mock, at the darkness, and the rain—the dread, cold rain of winter—lisped and whispered through the woods, Gray Ghost went gliding through the gloom. It was powerfully dark, and because the rain would keep talking to itself among the twigs, Gray Ghost had to trust to his eyes and leave his ears out of the reckoning.

Suddenly the great cat sunk into the ground, so it seemed, turned from a reality into a possible something, a something that did not move, and was, therefore, almost invisible. A sheep had bleated; a thin, helpless sound above the ceaseless, swishing patter of the rain.

Gray Ghost knew enough about the geography of the place to know that he was on the edge of the wood, not a great way from some sheep pens. But this was not the cry of a penned sheep; it was the vacuous complaint of a stray.

Gray Ghost said nothing. He was—it is a foolhardy trick among cats—working the regular hunting beat he had marked out for himself; so he knew his way.

He slid belly flat, ears pressed back, bob-tail switching eagerly through the treble blackness till the wood stopped dead, and he with it. Before him—a sea, a void of inky gloom—lay a vast, thirty-acre field. Any horror might lie out there, and he had no love for the open; his realm was the shadows, to drift among them, to be himself a shadow. Of what use shadows in the open?

But the sheep, the sheep that was lost or had got loose or both, the sheep was out there, invisible as yet, but there. And the chance might not come again. No lamb this time, but a sheep, full-grown and lost. A sheep alone with no bob-tail horrors or yelling shepherd shapes to make the attempt dangerous.

Gray Ghost lay and watched with his steady, inscrutable eyes, his absurd tail switching at every cry of the lonely woolly one out there in the darkness.

Anon, he stole up along the edge of the wood to take a precautionary sniff to leeward of his intended prey. Once, also, he vanished completely, but turned up after a few minutes as far in the opposite direction.

All this care and trouble were the result of his war with the keeper. He was taking no chances. Well, he knew the unsense of attacking in the open, when the inane chattering of the rain dulled warning sounds just as the wind does, but the temptation was too great. He had to risk it because—oh, because he was cat, I suppose!

Then at last, after half an hour's careful reconnaissance, he moved forward a few yards, and then came a space of flattened, motionless peering into the blanketing rain haze, followed by another move forward.

Eyes trained by lifelong night watching might have made him out or guessed him out, but not your eyes, reader, nor mine, either.

The lonely cry of the lost sheep thing butted through the night louder and louder as he drew near, cutting across the fizzle of the rain with an oddly annoying persistence.

A fox yapped once—that uncanny bark with the strange, guttural ending—and once something that was not a fox yelped painfully in the sheepfold not five hundred yards away. Otherwise, there was no sound, only drive upon glistening drive—the interminable sizzle of an English rainy night.

Had Gray Ghost been a deep thinker, which he was not, it might have struck him as passing strange that this stray, this lost woolly one did not run aimlessly all whither, as do such animals in a like predicament, but instead stayed only in one place. Therefore, when he saw a dirty white smudge loom out of the void ahead and start running round in a narrow circle for apparently no reason at all, he was not surprized. It was no concern of his if this smudge, which he knew to be the much desired sheep, would do so. No concern at all. Anything silly might be expected of a sheep.

He saw the creature in a minute more quite close. It was a fine sheep and quite fat. He raised his forequarters—the hindquarters being trailed along flat with the ground—to get a better view, to gloat. His greeny-yellow eyes—the only part of him visible unless you count a gray, ghostly, shadowy outline—narrowed with a look of unspeakable cruelty.

Slowly the big-whiskered face with the oddly tufted ears sank, sank till it rested on the huge, furry paws, made thus large to walk upon snow. Slowly, too, the comparatively weak hindquarters drew up, doubled under like a set spring. The lean, hard body became tense, the muscles drawn hard and short like steel.

An uncanny, luminous film flickered over the big, shining eyes and, save for the ceaseless twitching of his stumpy tail and a warning tremor of his hindquarters, Gray Ghost was still. Still and set. A living catapult ready to fire. He was about to spring.

Bang!

A heavy, blasting report rent the still air and went butting away in rolling, tumbling, clapping echoes among the woods. A slash of raw, red flame gashed the darkness ten yards away. And Gray Ghost? Ah! He never moved. Not so much as an ear moved. Only the bob-tail ceased bobbing.

He crouched and crouched and crouched till at length a shadow that was not a shadow behind a bush, where the report had burst from, got up and stared. It was the keeper, the keeper—he of the war.

Still staring he slid a fresh cartridge home in the breech of his gun. He was taking no chances, that keeper.

Then he crept forward, but Gray Ghost was not shamming. One does not sham with buck-shot through one's head, neck, and heart. He had died with great swiftness, died where he lay, without a tremor. He had crouched for his last spring, a long spring, the longest of all, for it was into oblivion.

"Ah!" cried the man, "I thought a tethered sheep 'ud fetch yer!"

And it had.

Me-Ali

by L. Paul

Author of "Meeks," "Stummicks," etc.

THE *Lobelia* lay at Helmshaven Pier, hatches covered, ready to sail. It was evening. Soon after midnight the *Lobelia* would poke her blunt bows out to sea and head across the Atlantic for England.

All seemed peaceful and calm aboard the rusty old tramp. The captain, Budgett by name, was, for once, content to give over his tirade against the inefficiency of mates in general and his own first officer in particular. Even the boatswain, standing by the forward gangway, watched the sailormen straggling shoreward with almost fatherly indulgence.

But in the forecastle a grave problem that had been perplexing many more important men in the capitals of Europe was threatening to start a battle.

Able Seaman Simmons, tall and muscular and possessed of a somewhat stubborn mind, while slipping into shoregoing togs was discussing this problem with "Hairy," the swarthy Welshman from Cardiff. "Corky," a Londoner, was on Hairy's side. Little Emmet, Simmons' partner in many an escapade, was trying to hustle his big chum off the ship before the argument got really acute.

The question in debate was, unfortunately, one that never could be settled to the satisfaction of all parties, it being, "Who won the war?"

"I says it plain and I says it final—" Simmons dragged a crumpled tie out of his ditty bag—"the Navy won the —— war, and him that says it didn't—"

"Wot Navy?" Hairy asked sarcastically.

"The blinkin' Swiss Navy," Corky put in.

Big Simmons dropped the tie and turned to face his opponents.

"For the last time," he warned them, "for the last perishin' time you lissen to me. The Navy won the war. And why? 'Cos I say so. And how do I know? 'Cos I was in it."

"You was a sort o' sleepin' partner in this here glorious business," suggested Hairy.

"No, you don't." Little Emmet grabbed his big chum's arm. "What in ——'s the use startin' another war till you got the old one argied out proper, Simmons. We got a date ashore."

"Lemme hit him once in the dirty beak. Lemme push his dial about and cave in that there lying mouth."

Simmons made war-like motions at Hairy.

"You come along."

Emmet picked up the crumpled tie and like a little tugboat warped big Simmons out of the forecastle.

He paused by the gangway to adjust the tie. Hairy and Corky, grinning affably, content now they had got the big man's goat, trooped out after them and hung over the rail on the forecastle head.

The boatswain beaming at the gangway in that pleasant fashion, saw who was now about to go ashore. His face hardened. He did not like this pair. They had a way of putting things over that annoyed his sense of his own importance.

"Now don't you swabs get left. We sails at midnight," he warned.

"Emmet's puttin' a gaudy leash on him," Hairy suggested, eying the tie. "Emmet'll lead his hound dog home, Bos. You leave it to him."

"He'd better." The boatswain scowled. "And if you come aboard drunk you'll catch whatfor, me lads." He stepped aside as the two sailormen came towards the gangway. "None o' them disgraceful high jinks is to be permitted," he warned.

"Don't hit him, don't hit him," whispered little Emmet.

"I won't. I won't," Simmons promised. "Leastwise not now."

But his big fists knotted as he swaggered down to the pier.

On the forecastle head Corky and Hairy watched.

"Seagoin' Mutt an' Jeff," Hairy suggested.

The two sailormen on the pier paused. Emmet grinned affably. Ahead lay the delights of the last night ashore, probably beer, certainly amusement of a sort. He could afford to pass over insults from unfortunate and penniless comrades who must remain aboard. Not so Simmons. The ex-navy man was still mad, mad clean through. These swine had made fun of the British Navy.

"I've a mind to put a head on 'em," he muttered.

"Come on, come on!" Emmet tugged at his arm. "Ain't you never goin' to learn nothin'? You can lam —— out o' Corky an' Hairy any old time. But this is our last night on land. And if you got to have a war, you perishin' admiral, why, pick on some landlubber."

"Who won the war?" chanted the two upon the forecastle head. "Who won the war?"

Simmons turned resolutely away from the ship.

"I'm not a forgetful man," he promised, "and I ain't got the patience of Job, and them that's got eyes had better see out o' the same while they can. I'm goin' ashore now, you pair o' sassy blighters, but I'm comin' back and I'm goin' to alter the looks of present company some when I get here."

"Come on, come on," Emmet urged. "First thing you know you'll spoil our evenin'."

"Mebbe you're right." Simmons squared his shoulders and stepped shoreward along the pier. "Just the same, one o' these days some one's goin' to ask a question about that there war and start another battle that'll be bigger yet. And if I don't lam —— out of the next curious-minded bloke I meet with war winnin' on his brain—"

"Come on, come on. That there harbor policeman is listenin'," Emmet warned as they approached the little shack where old Constable Rafferty holed up. "And when there's fightin' comin', best not talk about it to the police, Simmons."

OLD Rafferty was sitting out on the bench along the side of his shelter. Another old man was there too. They were deep in debate.

"Now you can say this and that." Old Rafferty's voice came to the ears of the two sailormen as they neared him. "You can say this and that, M'Greegor, but it remains to be seen how a passel o' boys in skirts with no more decency than to show their bare knees to them refined and polite Frenchies—"

"Eugh! Eugh!" snorted the M'Greegor sceptically. "Is it of fightin' ye are talking or is it deportment? A graand bow and a fine soft-spoken worrud an Irishman can exheebit, friend Rafferty, but when it comes to cold steel and baggonit work ye must admit that 'twas the Scotch laddies—"

"Who won the war? Like —— it was. I'll have ye know, ye porridge-fed boaster, if the lads from Munster, mostly Raffertys at that, hadn't won it, your bare-legged baggonit pushers would be there yet, disgustin' all modest folks—"

"Who won the war?" The M'Greegor got up and thumped on the bench with a heavy cane. "Who won the war? 'Twas the Scotch!"

Little Emmet grabbed his big partner by the arm.

"I'm an anchor, you ruddy derelic' and them's shoals," he warned.

"Lemme go talk to 'em for a bit," Simmons snorted. "Irish is it? Or Scotch? Lemme just tell 'em the truth, once and for all."

The two old men went on with their argument. Big Simmons, his face working, shook himself free of Emmet's restraining hand.

"I'll be tac'ful as ——," he promised, and walked over to old Rafferty.

"Who won the war?" Simmons stood before the two old men as he repeated the question. Then his eye travelled over the blue uniform of the minion of the law. "'Twasn't police," he snarled. "'Twasn't no wreck from the old men's home," and he eyed the M'Greegor. "'Twas the ruddy British Navy, mates. That's what."

"The Navy!" snorted old Rafferty.

"The Navy!" M'Greegor repeated.

Then old Rafferty with elaborate politeness got up and bowed.

"Ye are under a misapprehension, mister," he said. "We was talkin' about fightin', not yachtin'."

"Come away, come away." Little Emmet bustled up, dug an elbow into big Simmons' ribs. "That there's police. Bustin' such is jail business."

Simmons calculated the chances. These were old men and he couldn't, with honor, put a head on either. One of them was police, and discretion the better part of valor.

"Get ye gone, get ye gone," Rafferty tapped the silver badge on his coat. "Leave us to our pleasant conversation, ye bruiser, or I'll put the dirty words on ye that spell 'good mornin', Judge'."

Simmons went.

Only when Ireland and Scotland were safely astern did little Emmet voice his complaint.

"Now, look here," he pleaded, halting in the middle of the street. "If so be you're plannin' on wars, go to it. But go alone."

Simmons was still boiling inside.

"First it's the bosun and them shipmates that I can't hit if I want to get ashore. Then it's two old men that'd bust if I patted 'em. War? A fat chance there is of me gettin' any battlin' satisfaction. You just let me lay alongside some human bein' in his prime that'll speak contrary and I'll show you war."

"You mean you're goin' to wander round all night waitin' for some one to spout how he won the last war? And all so you can start another one?" Emmet turned away. "Very well, me lad. But it's not Emmet's way o' spendin' the last night in port. Not by a jugful."

He started off, but paused again as a group of sailormen came swaggering down the street towards them.

"I'll give you one more chance," said Emmet. "If you got to get them eyes blacked, do it shipshape and proper. Here's them Frenchy sailormen off'n that Miquelon schooner. You ask them who won the war and you'll have your fight. Keep it in our perishin' seagoin' fambly. And then when they've lammed sense into you, mebbe we can enjoy what's left of the evenin'."

"It's—it's a matter o' principle." Simmons eyed the approaching Frenchies doubtfully. "Me, I ain't quarrelsome, but when every kid in school knows how the British Navy won the war, I ain't lettin' nobody else lay claim to it. No, sir."

"You put it up to them Frenchies."

Emmet waved a greeting to the newcomers as they came up chattering volubly.

There were four of them, stoutly built, short squat chaps, wearing baggy blue trousers and sweaters, and all four grinning affably.

"*Bon soir*," they hailed the two sailormen from the *Lobelia*.

"Wait a bit, mates, drop your hook," Emmet hailed in return. "My chum here's got a question to ask ye."

"*Mais oui?*" One of the Frenchies had a smattering of English. "You are *matelots*. We stop an' say, 'How you was.' Polite, is it not?"

"He says you're a mattlow," Emmet nudged his big companion.

"What's that?" Simmons scowled at the Frenchies.

They weren't very big. Unless he picked a fight with the whole lot, it would not satisfy his present thirst for blood.

"I don't think mattlow's a fightin' word. I kind o' figger he means we're sailormen, like he is," Emmet explained.

"*Oui oui.*" The Frenchy became eloquent with lips, hands, and shoulders. "Me, I am Henri Policaire, *matelot*, sailormans—"

"Then mebbe you'll answer a question."

Emmet prodded his big shipmate with his elbow.

Simmons eyed the four Frenchies morosely. Then he decided that half a fight was better than none. It would vindicate his principles at any rate.

"Who won the perishin' war?" asked Able Seaman Simmons.

Henri, with many gestures of hand and shoulder, translated the query. The four Frenchies looked at Simmons steadily, as if examining some peculiar specimen.

"You there, Henree, who won the ruddy war?" he repeated.

Henri eyed him pityingly. Henri's four companions stared wide-eyed at this monster of ignorance. Who won the war? He could ask this? To foolish question number ninety-nine some answer must be given. Yet to try to enlighten this big man would be sheer waste of time. The reply must be typically Gallic, must touch lightly, like a rapier.

Their reply, when it came, was up to specifications. Henri and his three comrades linked arms. Then, bowing politely to big Simmons, they stepped around him and, heads up, chests out, they marched down the road singing.

The words of the "Marsellaise" floated back to the two English sailormen—

"Allons enfants de la patrie—"

Big Simmons watched them go. He felt they were putting something over on him. Certainly he had had no chance to pick the desired quarrel.

"Ho! Ho!" Emmet jeered. " 'Who won the war?' you says, and they told you they did, Simmons, and like a lamb you've took it."

"Like —— they told me. That there song don't mean nothin'. It don't say who won the war."

"The engfants of the patree won it, accordin' to them," Emmet laughed. "Well, now you've played your last card, suppose we enjoy ourselves decent and civilized. Let's go up to that there tent show on the hill and look them freaks over."

He edged away from his big comrade a bit before he finished what he had to say.

"Ay, freaks," concluded Little Emmet. "You'll feel more at home among suchlike, Simmons."

II

THE two sailormen reached the tent show. A fourth-rate affair it was of faded signs and faked wonders.

They passed by the oriental dancing girls with never a glance. The museum of wonders was dismissed with one brief criticism from Emmet.

"No sea sarpint," said he, eying the list of attractions. "And any show that can't give me somethin' improvin' don't get my money."

They came at last to a small tent before which, on a narrow plank platform, a barker extolled the merits of a huge, dusky, strong man, blanket-wrapped, known to fame as the Mastodon of Morocco.

That barker had finished his description of the Mastodon when the sailormen arrived, but one glance at the posters and painted banners told them that, to this dusky son of the desert, "Iron was but as straw. He snapped it."

"Strong man," Emmet said.

"An' heathen." Simmons was still boiling inside. "Jus' my luck. If that there bloke was a Christian he'd maybe have his idees of who won the war an' I could argy with him to a fareyewell. But them coffee-colored heathens! ——, they didn't even know there was a war."

"He's takin' off his coverin's," Emmet reported. "An' you got to admit he's meaty."

The big Mastodon of Morocco was indeed shedding his blanket, was flexing mighty arms. The barker stopped his ballyhoo for a moment. The Mastodon creaked across the platform to a more prominent position and tapped himself on the chest with all the abandon of a base drummer.

"Me Ali," said he proudly.

It was all the English he knew. From the far edge of the crowd came a cheer. The four French sailormen were there. One of them with quick eye had spotted something, a medal that glittered on the Mastodon's chest.

"Vive la France!" Henri Policaire cried.

The Mastodon fingered that medal. A broad smile on his face, he turned towards those citizens of France. The barker seized the psychological moment.

"The *croddy gare* friends," he yelled. "The medal that was pinned on him by a Frenchy field marshal that kissed him friendly while all them Vie Parisians stood by cheerin'. Yes, ladies an' gents, right here before you stands a hero of the Great War. He come from his native Sahara to fight for democracy in the First Morocco Division and—"

Big Simmons pricked up his ears. The barker's little extempore speech was making sense to him at any rate.

"Keep still, keep still." Emmet dug him fiercely in the ribs.

"I won't, neither." Simmons started to work his way towards the platform. "I

been lookin' for a guy like that all night. I'm goin' to ask him a question."

"——!" Emmet looked the Mastodon over, then shuddered. "He'll answer ye to your taste," promised Emmet as he slipped through the crowd behind his bigger comrade. "Well, some one's got to take yer dead body aboard and it may as well be me."

By the time they reached the platform's edge the Mastodon had wrapped himself once more in the blanket and the barker was swinging into the final phase of his ballyhoo. Waving a bundle of dollar bills he was walking up and down shaking the money at the crowd, making his nightly offer.

"And to any one who stays with him, wrestlin' or box fightin', for five minutes we will pay one hundred dollars, ladies and gents, one hundred dollars."

He stopped, for some one had grabbed him by the ankles.

"You got your man." It was Simmons. "But I want to ask him a question first, this here Me-Ali bird."

THE barker grinned. Here was the sort of situation he liked, a hick with a fool grudge. He helped Simmons up on the platform, then beckoned the big, dusky Mastodon forward once more.

"Who won the ruddy war?"

Simmons' voice shook a little. This dark man was indeed a mastodon. But he was a person of principle and stubborn to boot, was Simmons. So as the heathen stood silent he repeated the question.

"Who won the war?"

The Mastodon regarded him puzzled. Then decided to air his single linguistic accomplishment.

"Me Ali," said he, tapping himself on the chest.

"Like —— you did." Simmons turned to the barker. "A'right. I'm ready," he informed him.

"Wrestlin' or boxin'?" asked the barker.

"Both," said Able Seaman Simmons for the honor of the British Navy. "Both."

From the edge of the platform came a voice, a pleading voice. It was Little Emmet.

The barker turned from the pleasing prospect of a besieged ticket booth.

"Who the —— are you?" he asked.

"I'm a friend o' the fambly," said Little Emmet. "I got to stick around to take charge o' the body."

The barker reached down a hand.

"You can act as his second. There won't be no more than one round," he laughed. "And now let's get inside. That there tent won't hold another soul."

Inside the crowd had filled the tiers of flimsy seats that circled a small arena. Other patrons clamored at the entrance and tried to force a way in.

Behind a canvas curtain big Simmons put on a well worn wrestling suit. And the Mastodon of Morocco, toying with iron horseshoes, snapping strong ropes, exhibiting the different tricks of the strong man's trade, did his best to keep the cash customers amused until his irate opponent got ready.

The four French sailormen had obtained ringside seats. They had adopted the Mastodon as flesh of their flesh, were back of him in all he did. It is probable that, had occasion offered, Henri Policaire and his comrades from the Miquelon schooner would have kissed the heroic wearer of the *Croix de Guerre* as enthusiastically as had that French officer who had conferred the coveted decoration.

But this was no time for kissing. The entrance of the hapless Simmons, his tall figure looking a bit weedy in black tights, presaged the commencement of the sterner business of the night.

"Wrestlin' first."

The barker who owned the show was determined to give the crowd its money's worth. And if the Mastodon started with box-fighting, what chance was there that the sailorman would survive to wrestle?

The barker brought both men together in the tiny arena, whispered instructions, formal, quite unnecessary to Able Seaman Simmons, and then, watch in hand, started them on their way.

The Mastodon walking cat-like, pursued his opponent around the ring. Simmons, determined to throw no chance away, was trying to play safe. He did not realize that such a bulky creature could move with all the lithe grace of a tiger. He was soon undeceived. The Mastodon slid forward swiftly, hands out. His great fingers met naked flesh, clung, got their grip. He heaved and Simmons' toes left the ground. The Mastodon lifted him on high, twirled him around till he hung there, head downward, and then—

From the entrance came a cracked, somewhat peevish voice—

"This here house is pinched."

A small, whiskered, old man stood there, wearing a nickel-plated badge; in his hand a long, dangerous gun.

"This here house is pinched," said the little old man.

Then stepped aside as the cash customers with one accord began to depart.

The barker who owned the show dived under the canvas, stopped for a brief instant at the ticket booth to collect the day's takings, then disappeared. The four French sailormen forming a flying wedge beat their way through the mob of outward bound humanity to the Mastodon's side. Little Emmet, his duties as a second had proved merely nominal, stood rooted in a corner, mouth agape.

From the entrance, where he held his place with difficulty against the departing throng, the officer of the law repeated his remark—

"This here house is pinched."

Then, seeing that nobody cared, he elevated the muzzle of his gun and fired a shot through the canvas roof.

But somebody had cared. Not big Simmons, still held aloft; not the general public, wildly flying; not the barker, already well on his way to other scenes. The Mastodon alone retained the respect for the law and authority that is proper to such occasions. His great body was the home of the mind of a child. Here was law, authority that disapproved of him. He must, therefore, stop doing what he was doing. Having reasoned thus far the Mastodon of Morocco merely let go. Big Simmons dropped, head first, to the earth. And lay still.

And from the doorway, nearly clear now, the sheriff's voice came for the third time—

"This here house is pinched."

III

"NOW what in ——."

Big Simmons sat up in his bunk. It was morning, early morning by the gray light that struggled in through the dirty port.

"'S been a earthquake," he decided as he tried to turn a head, somewhat oversize, upon a neck that creaked. His hands went up and explored, found a cold compress that some kindly soul had wrapped about his throat. "'S been worse'n that," he said thickly. "'S the end o' the —— world."

Little Emmet in the bunk above him heard. He slipped out, came to his big chum's side.

"Stow that," he whispered hoarsely. "You're what's lef' of the battle o' the century."

"And who d'ye think you are, me lad," Simmons complained.

"I'm the diplomatic corpse fixin' up the cold remains," Emmet explained. "After you los' your footin' on the balmy air and fell down—"

"After what?"

"I see you ain't got your memory back, Simmons," the little man went on. "Well, d'ye recollect how that big cawfee-colored cargo boom reached out and hung ye up on high? Well, after that the sheriff come in and pinched the show. Stagin' a prize fight was his excuse, but his real grudge was that they didn't let him in free. Anyways, the guy that owned the dump beat it. 'Twasn't his tent anyway but a hired one, and since he owed this here Me-Ali money and couldn't pay it he was better off elsewhere and out o' jail, him and the day's takings. So he set a course and stood away. An' that left you lyin' there on the ground where Me-Ali had dropped you, and me waitin' to get you out, and them four French sailormen who'd stuck by Me-Ali, and o' course the long arm o' the law, that same whisker-sportin' old fool of a sheriff.

"——," Simmons tried to turn the head again. "An' after he had pinched the murderin' Mastodon for killin' me, what happened then?"

"He didn't pinch him, and lucky for you it was," Emmet proceeded. "Seems them Frenchies was standin' by, fair weather or foul, 'cos this smoke had won the *Croix de Guerre*. An' when the sheriff got peevish, they ups and slips him a five dollar bill and the pinch was lifted. An' then me and Henree got together and fixed up what was what."

"Oh, you did," Simmons growled. "Fine friend you be, consortin' with them furriners, blokes I had a down on, too, Next you'll be tellin' how you brung this here Me-Ali along and hid him in this very forecastle so he could finish his work on me."

"He ain't in no forecastle," Emmet corrected his chum. "But if you says sta'board lifeboat, you won't be a mile off."

"What the—" Simmons reached out

one hand and grasped his chum by the arm, shaking him.

"You lissen to me," Emmet explained, still patiently. "You ain't thinkin' straight yet, but make an effort. Look at it this way. Here's this Me-Ali stranded, lef' flat, his boss havin' walked off with the coin. An' here's four Frenchy sailormen willin' to go the limit for a pal. Me, I done noble. This Me-Ali wants to sniff his native Africa again, an' any bloke can get from Lunnon to Algiers. Here's the *Lobelia* goin' to Lunnon. Moreover, Simmons, me lad, here was you goin' to the *Lobelia*. Me, I fixed things up. I brung all the bits o' the puzzle together. 'Twas a picter puzzle, the Frenchies puttin' up the picter. They beat it back to the schooner o' theirs an' when they met us at the wharf they give me a fifty dollar bill for givin' this heathen his chance. It's rum-runner coin, but honest enough for you an' me. An' since this here Me-Ali carried you down from the tent show in a tarpaulin, we didn't need to break that fifty for a cab. And if after all I hadn't the right to let him lug ye aboard in a tarp, sayin' to the Bos how he was the man with the ship's laundry, 'well,' says I, 'wot's British justice comin' to, Simmons, me lad?' "

Simmons examined the fifty-dollar bill. It was real. He felt again that swollen neck, that aching head. Then he was not quite sure that the bill was so real after all, and he examined it again.

"I hopes he don't bear no grudges, this Me-Ali," he hazarded.

"Bless ye, Simmons, he's the heart of a kid," Emmet assured him. "And, me lad, if a stowaway bears grudges aboard this packet, it won't be against them that give him a chance to travel free."

"You mean he'll take a crack at the bosun?"

"And at the mates and the skipper, Simmons, me lad."

Simmons took the cold compress off his throat.

"This here ain't needed no more," he rejoiced. "A perfessional strong man that don't talk no English turned loose on them blighters, Emmet, me man, you're wastin' yourself on this here craft. It's a ambassador you ought to be."

"There ain't no ambassador can change places with me this voyage," Emmet grinned happily. "For by the rumpus on deck some one's found Me-Ali."

SOME one indeed had found the Mastodon of Morocco. The first officer, crossing the boat deck on his way to the bridge, stepped aside suddenly as a broad, brownish face protruded from beneath the starboard lifeboat cover. Face and cover together made him think of a vicious snapping turtle coming out of its shell. How could the uncertain, timid Mr. Stevens know that this was merely the way Me-Ali smiled.

"S-s-stowaway," he gasped.

The Mastodon of Morocco construed this as a word of welcome and he came right out.

"Bos! Bos!" The first made a swift decision. "Here's a heathen blighter stowed away."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir." The boatswain came up officiously. "What's your name, you swab? Who the —— are you?"

The Mastodon had recourse to his one English expression. He beat himself upon the breast with one ham of a hand.

"Me Ali," said he.

"Where'd ye come from, Me-Ali?"

"Me Ali."

"None o' yer impidence."

"Me Ali."

"He don't speak English." The first officer, seeing that this great hulk of a man wasn't going to start ructions, took over command once more as was his way when danger had passed. "Stick him in the galley till the cap'n comes on deck."

The boatswain beckoned the African peril away. Meekly Me-Ali followed him below.

"I hope I done right," the luckless first officer muttered. "But I know, right or wrong, I'll catch —— from Captain Budgett."

And right or wrong in other matters, First Officer Stevens was right in this, for five minutes later the captain came on deck.

"What's this? What's this? A stowaway on my ship, on *my* ship?" Captain Budgett, a small, stumpy man, roared angrily when his first officer made his report.

"I—I've passed him on the—the galley," the first informed his commander. "He—he doesn't speak English."

"Discipline going to the dogs," the captain complained. Had he himself dealt with the case it would have been the galley, undoubtedly, but he believed in keeping his mates in hand and didn't intend to approve of anything they did on their own.

"Ten to one he'll poison us. What's his

name? Must log this. Make a report to the owners. If it wasn't that it'd weaken discipline, which is weak enough, I'd countermand your orders and send him down to McTavish to pass coal. What's his name? Don't stand there goggling, Mister. What's the blighter called?"

"Me-Ali," the first stammered.

"—— foreigner," Captain Budgett thundered. "Bet you he poisons all hands before this time tomorrow."

And Captain Budgett of the *Lobelia* was, to a certain extent, dead right. For that evening Little Emmet, looking around to see that no officer was near, whispered the glad tidings to his comrade, Able Seaman Simmons—

"He's got his,"

"Who's got what, Emmet?"

"Cap'n Budgett. Strong man's meat's been the little man's poison, you might say."

"You don't say?" Simmons brightened. "But don't you go a-keepin' the glad tidings to yerself, me lad. Share 'em out generous. What's befell Cap'n Budgett?"

"He eat too hearty of a steak and kidney pie," Emmet explained. "I got it from the cook's boy. This here Me-Ali helped the cook to make that there pie, only the cook didn't know it. Says the heathen may ha' done it with that there new disinfectant, or it mebbe was jus' washin' sody. He'd told him to clean out them pots with the sody and mebbe the heathen had mistook orders. Anyways, Budgett et hearty and is sufferin' heartier. His steward says he's bedridden for a couple o' days, and whether he walks on deck then or is carried out feet first is a toss up. The prayers o' the congregation is desired for Budgett. An' that's that."

"Hark to the silence!" Simmons cocked an ear.

"What silence?" Emmet asked.

"The silence o' the great prayin'. But what have they done to the Mastodon o' Morocco?"

"Mister Stevens, the first, bein' in command, they ain't done nothin. It's my belief Stevens is yellow. He ain't insultin' no human hurricane. No sir, he passes the buck an' Me-Ali is passin' coal below. The cap'n ain't well enough to have him shot yet, so mebbe he'll pass coal for a day or two."

"I never did like that there chief engineer," said Simmons reflectively. "Now I'll just step aft an' pass the time of day good natured with some o' them stokers. You never know when they may be able to spin a yarn a man'd like to hear."

So it was Able Seaman Simmons who did the whispering next evening and a highly gratified Emmet who harkened to the tale.

"Put him in the firehold," Simmons reported. "I had it from a man who seen it. Stubbed his bloomin toe agin a two-inch pipe, water-feed pipe belike, an' bent an' grabbed it."

"And him a Mastodon," Emmet commented expectantly.

"A Mastodon is right," Simmons went on. "Well, he grabbed and he heaved, and when the chief engineer come forward to see why the black gang was swarming on deck this simple-minded Me-Ali presents him with a len'th o' his own feed pipe, grinnin' childish in his glee. No hard feelin's had he for the pipe now it was broke and out o' his way. No sir, Me-Ali he acts nigh like a Christian. But the chief, he ain't a Christian, just a Presbyterian from Aberdeen. He takes the pipe and bats that poor heathen over the conk, knockin' him cold."

"Where's he now?" Emmet asked. "Where's he now?"

"He's lyin' in the alley by the door o' the first officer's cabin, all wropped up in heavin' line. Them fools thinks it will hold him when he comes to his senses. Hold Me-Ali? Not heavin' line. But here's the cap'n's steward. I wonder how old Budgett's getting on. Cap'n comin' into port, Steward?"

"Not 'im," the steward reported. "Yestiddy 'e were bad but today 'e's a perhishin' sight worse. Chief Engineer come to tell 'im somethin'. Then 'e sent for Mister Stevens. I 'eard 'im tellin' that long bit o' misery to skin 'is own skunks. An' when I come in after I seen the skipper had took a relapse."

"And what did that skunk talk mean, Steward?" Emmet asked.

"It meant that this 'ere 'eathen dreadnought was put back on to the deck gang."

The steward sauntered aft once more.

"Now what?" Emmet asked. "Me-Ali's back home with his friends."

"I'd like to be sure I was regarded as such," Simmons shook his head. "But anyways we're sure o' one thing."

"And what's that?" Emmet asked eagerly.

"We know —— well one o' his enemies is the bosun," Simmons told him.

IV

THE third day of the captain's illness found the *Lobelia* shouldering her way through a short, choppy sea. The boatswain, a pushing sort with an urge to invent work when none seemed necessary, had hinted to Mr. Stevens, the vacillating first officer, that the boat deck was really a sight. Mr. Stevens, with a pathetic desire to please his commander if and when he came on deck a convalescent, issued the necessary orders.

"That there Me-Ali, sir," the boatswain rashly remarked. "Since he broke them lashings and come forward, he ain't done nothin'. I ain't got him down for any watch. Him an' them two, Simmons and Emmet, they can tackle the job."

"Right."

The first went into the chart-room, closed the door. The boatswain heard the lock click.

"Yellow," he decided. "He don't maintain the prestige of an officer."

And as he went forward to get his three victims, he thought how narrow was the gap between a brave boatswain and a craven first mate. Boatswains, he decided, were, after all, officers of a sort.

He did not see any motive in the strange alacrity with which Simmons and Emmet obeyed his snappy orders. As for Me-Ali, the coffee-colored idiot was just a child. If you understood him and held a firm hand over him he would work as well as any one.

The boatswain watched them as they toiled. Simmons and Emmet pushed the holystones to and fro. Me-Ali, standing by with the hose, sloshed water on the dirty planking of the deck ahead of them. The boatswain leaned comfortably against a funnel stay and observed how iron-handed discipline maintained order.

A wheeling gull turned suddenly, slid on motionless wings across the ship, low over their heads. Me-Ali, child-like in other things besides work, watched it with almost infantile curiosity. As it tipped and wheeled, he tipped. The hose moved with him, its nozzle swinging to and fro.

"Hold hard there, ye heathen, hold hard—" the boatswain cried.

Then, *slosh!* The stream smote him in the face.

Me-Ali saw what he had done. It was regrettable, he felt. But surely this wild-eyed maniac was taking it to heart far too deeply. For the boatswain wrenching the holystone and its long handle away from little Emmet, sought to use it as a mace upon Me-Ali's mastodonic skull.

The boatswain, alas, was not a strong man. Hence his motions were slow. Me-Ali observed them curiously. Then, at the right moment he sidestepped, grabbed the boatswain by the collar and, lifting him up, dropped him down the port engine-room ventilator cowl. The two sailormen listened to the *bump-slide-bump* of his descent.

Big Simmons laughed.

"Mark him off your list, Emmet," he said at last.

But Emmet was serious.

"What about this poor heathen?" He propounded the problem as sounds of tumult came up from that ventilator shaft. "You want him shot at sunrise?"

"Course not." Simmons patted Me-Ali on the shoulder.

"Then back my play."

Emmet ran up the short ladder and banged on the chart-room door.

"What's wrong, what's wrong?" the first officer asked, his voice a-quaver. Command was killing the nervous Mr. Stevens.

"Bosun's went mad, an' jumped down a ventilator," Emmet reported. "Three o' us seen it, sir."

"Who is it? Who is it?"

"Emmet an' Simmons an' Me-Ali," Simmons reported.

"Is he—is he dead, the bosun?"

The first unlocked the door. The sight of Me-Ali smiling genially on the boat deck while he played the hose conscientiously upon its dirty planking reassured him.

"He ain't dead, sir. I heard him cussin' below after he lit." Emmet went on with his worthy lie. "But he took a dislike to that pore heathen."

"What's to be done? Oh, what's to be done?" Mr. Stevens muttered weakly.

"Give him another job, sir," Emmet suggested. "The bosun's like to knife the poor bloke, sir."

"He might have a knack with tools, sir." Simmons remembered that the ship's carpenter owed him five bob. "Carpenter's busy these days, sir. Try him with 'Chips'."

The first knew that he should not listen to such presumptuous talk from foremast scum, but it was also reasonable talk.

"Send the carpenter here," he commanded. And then he stepped inside to summon the second mate.

When the carpenter arrived he found the second, a gossipy soul, in command. Mr. Stevens, the first officer, was ill—a sudden attack of heart. He had left orders to the effect that the heathen stowaway, Me-Ali, was to become carpenter's mate. And if the boatswain could come out of the engine room unassisted, he was to be clapped in irons. Aside from that nothing strange was on the cards.

V

"WHEN we strikes port," said Hairy, the Welshman the next morning as a group of sailormen loafed on the sunny forecastle head, "when we strikes port, law an' order an' police, ——'s goin' to break loose for some folks. This here Me-Ali—"

"Blimey, you said it wrong. It's if we strike port," Corky corrected him. "He's a Jonah, that's wot. Here's the cap'n sick, mebbe dyin'. Here's the bosun locked up. Here's the first officer with a heart stroke—"

"An' there's Me-Ali below helpin' Chips fix up the bust bunks as peaceful as a little child," Simmons put in. "Lay off'n him, ye swabs, an' lay off'n him for keeps."

"Aye, aye." Emmet backed him up. "An' as for the cap'n bein' sick, the steward told me he was comin' on deck today. I was sort o' hopin' he would." He eyed the bridge deck longingly.

"And for why?" Hairy asked.

"'Cos he might meet a friend o' mine. An' there he is, bless his kind heart. There is Budgett a-totterin' out like they do in the fairy books. I wishes him here, an' here he comes, sick an' infirm but, by the look on his face, he's himself, as sour as usual."

IT WAS true. The captain, leaning on the arm of the steward, was stumbling up to the lower bridge where, behind the weather-cloth, he sank into a deck chair.

His eye ran disapprovingly over the forward part of his vessel. The third officer was on watch, and the captain never had liked the bumptious Mr. Jones. He was about to point out the many defects he had noticed when from the forecastle burst a procession of two. The carpenter came first; behind him a big, hulking figure that could be none other than Me-Ali, the demon stowaway.

The carpenter, shedding nails from his apron as he ran, disregarded all laws of procedure and made for the bridge as if he had a right to walk that sacred ground. Me-Ali, like a bloodhound on the trail, followed.

"All hands on deck," croaked Captain Budgett with the remains of the finest commanding voice on the north Atlantic. All hands came.

"Catch them two. Kill 'em if necessary." He pointed aft. The carpenter, having reached the bridge, had discovered it too confining and had leaped down to the boat deck. Me-Ali was after him without delay.

"They're playing ring-around-a-rosy by the boat yonder." The captain, clinging weakly to the rail, guided his faithful seamen as they came reluctantly to the pursuit.

"He's foamin' at the mouth! He's mad, clean mad with fear!" Simmons cried as, with the other sailormen, he stopped a few paces distant from the lifeboat. Around and around it went the carpenter; around and around went Me-Ali. The carpenter was, indeed, foaming at the mouth. Me-Ali, however, was smiling. In his brawny right hand the Mastodon of Morocco clutched several four-inch nails.

The carpenter tripped over a trailing rope. The entire ship's company—even the first officer had come on deck by now—the entire assemblage of potential heroes let the chance of a daring rescue slip. To a man they stood still. They knew Me-Ali. And in that instant's pause Me-Ali was upon the fallen one, had grasped him by the collar.

"Put him in irons. Put him in irons," the second mate advised.

Me-Ali whirled the carpenter round. He was not angry. The noble-hearted rescuers decided to watch a minute before risking life and limb. Perhaps Me-Ali wasn't going to nail the carpenter's hide to the deck after all.

The carpenter thought he was. He sobbed.

"I seen him do it. I seen him do it and it ain't human," he moaned over and over.

Me-Ali, finding his audience attentive, released his prisoner. Then, taking one nail in his right hand he doubled his fist, adjusted the nail head, lifted his hand high and, bringing it down, drove the nail through the stout planking of the lifeboat.

"Showed him how to nail a plank, and look what he done." The carpenter, unversed in the tricks of strong men, trembled still as he explained. "Take them nails away from him, take them nails away from him. He'll drive one through iron, he will, if you let him be. He'll drive 'em into me."

Me-Ali with a pleased smile drove another spike into the boat.

From behind the circle of gaping sailormen and inactive officers came a cold, rasping voice. "Now what the ——!"

Captain Budgett was himself again. He was weak, but his temper did not suffer as his body did.

"I said catch or kill that pair. Call yourselves officers?" said Captain Budgett. "Is this a convention? Who's holding old home week on the boat deck?"

Nobody was by this time; nobody, that is, but Me-Ali.

One by one officers and seamen had vanished. Captain Budgett and the disrupter of discipline stood face to face. The captain, in honor of his recovery, perhaps because he wished very much to play the martinet, had donned his best uniform.

"Who the —— are you?" asked he.

The big, dusky man tapped himself on the shoulder. "Me-Ali," he said modestly. Then he looked down at the nails still clutched in his left hand and by a supreme effort of memory recalled some more English. "Tara! Tara! On'y one dime—on'y one dime—tenpart of dollah—"

He put a period to his first comprehensive speech aboard the *Lobelia* by driving another spike with his hammer of naked flesh.

Captain Budgett stood there staring, but he had an alert mind. Me-Ali's English had been limited and obscure, but it found an echo in the captain's memory. He had seen circuses with their sideshows and strong men. He had heard the barkers easing dimes out of reluctant pockets. He motioned Me-Ali to follow. Obediently, like a great dog, the nail-driving incubus padded along behind him to his cabin.

Captain Budgett summoned his steward, a shrewd little Cockney. "You talk a lot o' furrin' lingoes, Haynes," he said. "Try and get sense out of this smoke."

"'E ain't French by the look o' 'im, sir," Haynes ventured. "And French is the only lingo I speak real good."

"Try it on. Try it on. I seen miracles this day," Captain Budgett explained. "Maybe they ain't over. Maybe there's snuff-colored Frenchmen."

"*Parley vous Francais?*" asked Haynes.

Me-Ali bowed politely to the captain of the *Lobelia*. "*Oui, mon Capitaine,*" said he.

"I told ye so," triumphed Captain Budgett. "Frog-talk his story out o' him."

In five minutes the story was frog-talked out.

"He's a strong man, is he?" thought Captain Budgett. "And he's simple as a child at that. Think o' him chasin' that there Chips around just because the fool wouldn't watch him do that trick! But think o' the —— he's raised with discipline aboard this packet. Well, there's but one thing to be done. He's wrecked discipline and made a fool o' each and every officer. 'Tis him must make things right. Haynes," he commanded, "you go tell the mates I want 'em all in the chartroom."

Then with Me-Ali beside him he sauntered forth on deck. He was still weak, was Captain Budgett, but by the light in his eyes it was clear he was feeling better.

The four mates were waiting. At the sight of the Mastodon of Morocco, Mr. Jones, the third mate, backed towards the other door of the chartroom.

"Stand fast!" Captain Budgett thundered. "A fine lot of children I've got as mates aboard this packet. A splendid lot o' British seamen ye are! What are ye afraid of? This here furriner?"

THEIR faces betrayed them. The fact that Me-Ali seemed under control did not cut any ice.

"You needn't faint, Mister Jones, and stop blinkin', Mister Stevens. This here is Ali, not Me-Ali, but Ali. In his poor furrin' way he was only tryin' to do his best. But ye wasted him. Good thing I got on deck again before ye quite ruined the ship. And now he's more than Ali, he's Mister Ali."

"You don't mean," gasped Mr. Stevens, "you aren't trying him as a mate?"

"You tried him at most other ratings," Captain Budgett growled. "And what happened? Discipline gone to the dogs. Sailormen having garden parties on the boat deck. But me, I seen into his poor dumb soul. He has his ambitions like any man. He's a strong man and a wrassler and willing to please. He's devoted, as you might say,

to his art. And so I'll use him where them talents sort of fit. He's fifth mate. And don't ye go glowering at each other, ye mangy bunch o' halfwits. He's better'n ye are."

"He don't know no navigation, sir," the second officer protested.

"There's a heap you folks don't know about mates' work too."

The captain led them out on the bridge, Ali trotting faithfully to heel. The captain not only wore badges of authority but he acted as a captain should. Ali, the ex-soldier, was, therefore, the captain's dog. "There's a heap you don't know that he can teach ye."

"What's that, sir?" asked the cocksure fourth.

"How to handle men," Captain Budgett roared. "Where's the bosun?"

"Locked up, sir," Mr. Stevens replied.

"Let him out. Bring him here."

Captain Budgett waited impatiently till the damaged boatswain appeared.

"All hands on deck, Bos," he commanded.

The boatswain hobbled away.

While the men were assembling, Captain Budgett turned once more to the line-up of mates. Ali, too, looked them over. The captain took the cap from the first officer's head, showed it to the dusky giant. Then he doubled his fist and made as if to smite Mr. Stevens.

Ali too doubled his fists. Mr. Stevens trembled. But the captain pointed to the officer's cap, shook his head sadly and replaced in on Stevens' brow.

"No bust mate," he said. "No—bust—mate."

Ali smiled in comprehension. He patted Mr. Stevens reassuringly on the shoulder. Then he passed down the line. The second and third had officer's caps on. Ali patted them also. But the hapless fourth was bareheaded. He had been asleep when the row started. Ali did not, speaking truthfully, strike him. He just pushed him.

The fourth nearly fell through the chart-room wall.

"All along o' untidiness," the captain explained. "You wear your proper cap and he won't touch you. I don't blame him for bustin' you, Mr. Jenks. You don't look like a mate. Now, Bosun, send up a couple o' the men."

The boatswain turned to the assembled sailorfolk on the well deck below.

"Simmons and Emmet," he picked the victims.

The two unfortunates shambled up to the bridge.

"Send another one with 'em," the captain cried. "I want a thorough demonstration."

"You trot up, Corky, me lad," the boatswain cried, "and you'll get that smile wiped off, I'll wager," he added as the miserable Corky followed.

The captain waited till the three stood before him.

"Now you Dark Wrath," he turned to Ali, "no cap. No cap," he pointed out the deficiency. "No cap. Not mates. I say 'bust', you bust."

Me-Ali looked the three over gravely.

The captain, to illustrate, made a feint at Corky.

Me-Ali got his cue. He stepped across and cracked the hapless Corky with the palm of his hand.

The sailormen below saw Corky's head snap back, then he disappeared behind the bridge weathercloth.

"Now men," the captain explained to them, "this here is Mister Ali, the fifth mate. And when discipline gets slack I'll just turn him loose on ye till all is correct again. Ye can watch him work on those two."

Me-Ali stood expectant, waiting further orders. Little Emmet began to sniffle. As for Simmons he knotted his fists. If this ungrateful heathen was going to try any rough stuff, he'd at least put up a fight.

"You bust them two," Captain Budgett ordered. "Bust 'em good, Mister Ali," and he waved his arms suggestively.

Ali looked them over. Then it occurred to him. All this pleasant marine interlude he owed to these two who had brought him aboard. Allah had used them, doubtless, to order his steps. A wave of gratitude surged over him. Across his memory flashed an instance of a nation's gratitude, when an elderly officer had pinned on him a *croix de guerre*. White man's ways were strange thought Ali, the Mastodon of Morocco, but they were what they were. He advanced. Then to the horror of Captain Budgett he kissed little Emmet full on each cheek.

"Me Ali," he said, tapping himself upon the shoulder before he turned to salute Able Seaman Simmons.

A New Deal for the Duke

A Complete Novelette by Thomson Burtis

Author of "Groody Among the Gushers," "Slim Grabs Some Grease," etc.

IT WAS Derby Day in Louisville. No Kentuckian would have needed a newspaper to inform him of that fact. The great stands and clubhouse of Churchill Downs were packed like a New York subway train at 5 P. M. Sixty thousand, more or less, racing enthusiasts overflowed into the infield and filled every nook and cranny in the betting shed, the paddock, and the spacious promenades. A solid mass of cars moved sluggishly, like a great snake with its tail in the city and its head at the track, a distance of four miles. It was already time for the third race, but still they came.

In the great betting shed the dozens of pari-mutuel machines, manned by sweating operators, were clicking like mad, as eager bettors fought to get their two dollars or their two hundred down. Pickpockets slipped through the crowd, and detectives, sent to Louisville from all over the country, tried ceaselessly to spot them. Already at the gates of the track they had rolled back dozens of the criminal army which centers in Louisville on Derby Day. Pickings are large and working conditions ideal.

A tall, slender young man who seemed to be the only calm person in the hot, excited, surging betting shed picked his way slowly through the crowd at the rear of the inclosure. When he reached the dense mass of men who formed a solid phalanx around the hundred-dollar machines, watching the trend of the big bettors, he circled out on the promenade on his way toward the paddock.

"After I get there I won't be able to see this plater, anyway," he soliloquized as he saw the paddock surrounded by men, twenty deep.

Nevertheless, he made his quiet way toward the place where the entries for the next race were being walked around by their trainers. He walked with a barely perceptible limp. Although slender, his shoulders were broad enough to make him look considerably larger than he was. He wore a grayish-brown tweed suit of impeccable cut, and a cap of the same material. Over his shoulders he carried a pair of field-glasses.

His thin, well-cut mouth widened in a cynical smile as he spotted "Jippy" Saunders. So Jippy was out again, was he? He wondered how the well-known pickpocket had slipped by the gates. Back in 1917 at New Orleans Jippy had been sent up for eight years.

The young man had reached the fringe of the mob around the paddock when he heard a half-shout—

"'Duke' Daly!"

He turned to confront a short, stocky, bright-eyed little fellow who wore a loud cap on the side of his black hair, and was unmistakably Jewish.

"You can't tout me, Jake," said Daly with a brief smile. "How's tricks?"

"Great, Duke. Who you bettin' for?"

"Myself."

"Ain't with the Clover Stable any more? Then what you doin' at the track?"

"Louisville's where I live."

"Out o' the army hey? Or wasn't you ever in it? 'Big Jim' said you was."

"I was in it and out again. Well, have you hit an opening day special yet? Or got somebody to bet every horse in the race for you?"

"Don't kid me, Duke!" wailed the little tout. "So help me, I come here with twenty-two bucks, and when that Simeon hound run backwards in the last race it left me with two bucks—count 'em, Duke—and a two-dollar bill at that!"

"When'll you learn not to bet two-year-old races? Or bet at all, for that matter?"

"Got anything in the next race, Duke? Honest, ain't yuh workin' for no stable?"

"No. I don't know about the next one. Thought I might put down a little bet on Flying Heels if the odds were right."

"They're going to 'er as if she was in," said the tout positively. "She won't pay over even money."

"Then it's no bet," said Daly evenly. "Flying Heels isn't an even money shot running against ploughhorses. Not as long as Dieperman owns her and Bert Grats rides her. But I have got a bet in the Derby. Save your two-spot until then."

"What is it?" queried the tout eagerly.

Which was a tribute in itself from Jake. Or any tout. Despite their long apprenticeship on the track, the professional gentry of the race-tracks will swallow information "right from the feed-box" as eagerly as the veriest tyro. But Jake's obvious, almost frantic eagerness was based on the past reputation of Duke Daly back in the days when he was betting commissioner for the Clover Stable. For the Duke in those days had made an outside personal bet about three times a week. Then it was a big one, and more than half the times he won.

"See me behind the hundred-dollar pay-off window five minutes before the race," Daly told him. "If I tell you now you'll have it spread to every sucker you can inveigle into making a bet for you."

"Don't make me laugh," barked Jake. "Y'know I had Gravy Girl in the first race, and couldn't get nobody to bet a deuce for me?"

"Why didn't you bet her yourself?"

Jake grinned.

"I thought I was givin' a bum steer on a possible long shot," he admitted.

His small, hard black eyes, bright as shoe buttons, had been shifting repeatedly to Daly's face, and there was, in his attitude, an element of puzzled wonder. It might have been due to his disbelief in Daly's statement that he was no longer a betting commissioner or connected with the race-track in any way. To a man like Jake, it was inconceivable to think that any man who could get a job—as every one who had ever known Daly's reputation when he was betting for the biggest single stable in the country knew that he could—around the track would not leap at the chance.

Suddenly it came out:

"Duke, I'll be —— if there ain't somethin' funny about yuh. I know you ain't no ringer, but you look different. You're as different from what you used t' look like as a two-year-old is from Exterminator."

Daly smiled. It was not a boyish smile, not did it seem to lighten the settled gravity of his face. It was repressed, as was his manner of speech and his whole attitude, as if he would not or could not let himself go.

"I was in the Air Service, Jake, and had a wreck that made hamburg steak out of my face. Those doctors knew more about putting a man back together again than you know about fleecing a get-rich-quick amateur who thinks the Kentucky Derby is a new style of hat. They built me a new face."

Jake drew a long breath.

"I was commencin' t' think I was seein' things," he stated. "And yet, nobody could fall down on spottin' yuh, either. Well, Duke, I'll see yuh before the race. How's chances o' gettin' a ten spot from yuh to bet, if it's that good?"

Daly nodded.

"If you can't do anything this next race," he said.

HE STARTED to walk on, with a brief wave to the tout. The news that his selection in the next race, an unreliable "money horse" and a cheap selling plater at that, was going to be a small price cancelled his interest in the race. He was spoken to five times as he bought a paper and started back for the pay-off windows. Three of the men who yelled to him were plainly of the race-track, and one of them was as raggedy a negro stable boy as ever slipped around through a crowd peddling supposed stable information. It is a weakness of all racing patrons to believe implicitly that every water boy

around a stable knows exactly what horse is going to win every race.

To one who did not know the explanation for Daly's face, the Kentuckian's appearance would have been a puzzle. To any one who knew his past career, it would have become an annoying enigma which almost demanded solution.

For Daly, in his contained, cool attitude and his speech, gave the impression of age and experience and quiet, utterly poised self-confidence. And yet his face was as unlined as a boy's. Every feature was perfect, too perfect, like the vapidly handsome countenances of many male models or chorus boys. The nose was as straight as a string, and below the well-cut mouth the chin was square and firm. From the eyes down to the neck, it might have been the face of a good-looking girl, save for its size. There was not a trace of character or a line denoting experience in it.

Except for the eyes, which seemed like those of some other person until one talked with Daly. His eyes were his own. That terrible wreck when he had been a duel instructor down at Donovan Field, Texas, during the war, had not touched them. It had made mince-meat of his face, however. The doctors had chipped and grafted and worked like sculptors on him, and many rough-and-ready field medicos behind the lines in France and in the hospitals at flying fields could make present high-priced beauty specialists look like amateur butchers.

His eyes were his own, and the sordidness of parts of his past life, and the bitterness which had been part of his inner existence showed plainly in them. There was in them a sort of shadow, except at the rare times when he came out of himself and became vitally interested. They were a bit larger than normal, contrasted to his lean face, and dark gray with a sometimes disconcerting quality of seeming to plumb deeply into any other pair of optics in which they happened to be looking. There was a curious steadiness in them and also the serene quality which seems to be an inevitable result of gazing habitually far into the distance. The men who ride the vast, flat plains of the west always seem to have eyes like that; any out-of-doors man whose vision is not bounded by an office wall or a book has something of it.

Compounded with it was the indescribable something which comes of having seen much that is shocking, fearsome or sordid. A quality of disillusionment, if you will, and of the capability and lack of timidity which is the result of having overcome those same things. They might have been the eyes of a man of forty, set in an artificial face which might belong to a youth of twenty. In 1918, at twenty-seven, Daly's face had held deep lines from mouth to nostrils, and in its bold, hawk-nosed outlines there had been much that was bitter and saturnine. All that was gone now on the surface.

The pay-off windows, one to each pari-mutuel machine, were located directly in back of the machines themselves and facing away from the track. There were still long cues of lucky bettors collecting their proceeds from the last race, but at the fifty-and-hundred-dollar windows there was no one. Daly leaned back against a pillar and read the paper.

He glanced idly over the front page, devoted exclusively to racing with the exception of one column. His eyes fastened themselves on that column.

BELIEF THAT GIGANTIC CRIMINAL RING OPERATING IN MIDDLE WEST GROWS STRONGER

That was the way the two-column head ran, and Daly read the story with interest.

For a month the happenings to which the article referred had been an ever growing news sensation. In a territory bounded by Chicago, Dayton, Ohio, and Buffalo, New York, there had been a series of eight robberies totalling close to a million dollars. They had come at almost precise intervals—three days apart in most cases. In Buffalo the leading fur store had been expertly filched of one hundred and forty thousand dollars worth of furs. In Chicago, at 11:30 at night, while the Loop crowds were thick and noisy, a government mail truck, heavily guarded, had been captured and relieved of seven registered mail bags containing a ninety-thousand-dollar cargo. There had been seven in the gang. In Columbus it was jewels, and in a small town called Loreyville, Ohio, the bank had contributed eighty thousand dollars.

The thriving manufacturing city of Detland, Ohio, on the Great Lakes, however, had been the greatest sufferer. Twice the city had been relieved of surplus cash. Once

it had been the pay-roll of a large factory and the other time it had been the safe of a jewelry firm. The pay-roll robbery had been the only one of the lot which had been accomplished in the daylight hours.

The third case was not one to cause the forces of law and order so much weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, although it was the biggest haul of the series. For three suburban towns, close to Detland, along the Detland River, were headquarters for the hundreds of bootleggers who transported whiskey over from Canada. The Detland River at that point separates Canada from the United States. Two days after the crime had been committed an enterprising reporter for the Detland *News* unearthed the fact that federal officers had spotted what they believed to be a huge cache of drugs. The rum runners were gradually expanding into both narcotic smuggling and the transportation of aliens without the usual annoying formalities connected with immigration inspectors and customs officials and the like.

On the night the federal men descended in force for a raid, they had found four men bound and gagged, two of them wounded and a fifth man thoroughly and irrevocably dead. One of the wounded men, believing that he was about to die, which he did, confessed that there had been three hundred thousand dollars worth of drugs hidden in that dark cellar close to the river. Six men had got it and disappeared. All were masked, all wore caps and all were described as "big men." They had done their work without a word, seeming to know all there was to be known about how to proceed.

This job had not been known to the public at large for two days.

The size of the robberies, as their number rolled up, and the limited territory in which they took place naturally connected them in the public's mind. Then there always seemed to be six or seven men, in those robberies where any one at all saw anything. The completely puzzling feature of the whole thing was the faculty which the thugs had of apparently disappearing into thin air.

Mr. Robert E. Daly of Louisville, Kentucky, was most tremendously interested in the matter. Having spent three bitter months as a member of the underworld and several other months as a race-track man, during which he constantly touched and was respected by the queer half-world which is intimate with both crooks and honest men, he could appreciate the consummate daring, skillful planning and all-around clever work of that gang. According to the police a new talent or new talents had entered the criminal world. Scathing editorials from San Francisco to New York had driven the police of every large city in the country into huge round-ups of all known criminals without results.

The particular article he was reading was not the report of a new crime, but rather a résumé of the views of leading officers of the law. They had finally come to believe that there was a large criminal organization dabbling in smuggling, bootlegging and robbery, with possible tie-ups among the élite of crookdom in various cities. It was certain that the band had spotters of some sort or their work could not be so finished, accurately timed and efficient.

THE first bugle at the paddock had already sent the call out to waiting thousands, and now the second call came. Daly glanced down over the article, preparatory to making his way to the rail of the track when a voice said:

"Pardon me. Isn't this Mr. Robert Daly?"

There was a queer catch in his chest as Daly looked up and into the face of a gray-haired, stocky man with very broad shoulders. Then the Kentuckian's hand went out slowly and his eyes glowed warmly.

"Mr. Graves!" he managed to say and, as he shook hands, he fought to regain his customary poise.

"Glad to see you Duke," smiled the older man. His marvelously clear and penetrating eyes rested with what seemed suspiciously like affection on his younger companion. For his part, Daly had changed completely. There were only two people in the lonely life of the Duke who had the power to make him smile a whole-souled smile that extended to the eyes, and Graves was one of them.

"Come down to see the Derby?" Daly asked as he folded the paper.

His heart was thumping along like a heavily running motor as he wondered.

"I came a day earlier to see it," Graves

admitted. "But I really came to Louisville to see you."

"Business?" barked Daly.

Graves nodded.

"I hope so."

In that moment Daly became as boyishly eager as he was customarily reserved and quiet. It was as if his real self had burst through the artificial shell which encompassed it.

"Now let's forget it until after the races," suggested Graves quietly. "Who are you betting on?"

"Nothing in this race," returned the happy Daly. "You?"

"Flying Heels."

"If the odds are short, I'm afraid she won't win. She may, though, this being Derby Day and a big crowd out. A Derby crowd always bets everything in the race."

He glanced down the line of mutuel boards as they fought their way toward the track. Looked as though Flying Heels would pay around six dollars for a two-dollar ticket.

"I think she'll win at that," he told Graves, who had twenty dollars on the filly.

Flying Heels did win, but for once in his life Daly, born with the love of a thoroughbred in every drop of his Kentucky blood, failed to get a thrill out of the race. A thousand memories were swarming riotously in his brain and life changed like magic from a saverless existence to something full of satisfaction.

He looked sidewise at Graves. It was the first time he had ever seen that unknown, vastly powerful and effective servant of the government off guard. Even now, though, when he was wrapt up in those flying horses, his striking profile had something ruthless and keen and strong about it. Seen from the front, his face was broad-browed, thoughtful, almost ascetic. From the side, however, it seemed that his curved nose jutted forth from his face like the beak of a bird of prey. A slightly sloping forehead, thin, drooping lips and long, straight chin added to the effect. In the two views of his face there was obvious the dual quality in the man which had made him the foremost genius in the government service in his line. He was at once the reflective, analytical student and the pitiless, aggressive trailer of criminals. Now Daly was seeing a new side.

Daly, with the face of a boy and thirty years behind him which had been crammed with bitter experience which had given him the twisted viewpoint and reactions of a disillusioned old man, was fiercely happy. The crowded months came back to his mind in a rush, and all that was pleasant about them, which was pitifully little, was connected closely with the man beside him.

II

GRAVES turned to him, his eyes aglow. The numbers went up on the official board.

"Well, son, Flying Heels did it!" he chuckled. "Let's go collect, eh?"

They fought their way through the crowd and went around to the comparatively quiet pay-off windows.

"You'll have to wait a while before the price is announced, Mr. Graves," Daly told him. "Have you got time to give me some idea about what I'm to do? Why you're here to see me, I mean?"

"About the same sort of thing as down on the border," returned Graves. "Didn't I see you reading an article on this series of big robberies all over the Middle West?"

"Yes."

"If you're willing, I'm going to shoot you right into what I conceive to be the midst of them," stated Graves.

He was suddenly businesslike, talking in clipped, decisive phrases.

He looked around at the motley crowd and said:

"I know you're on the *qui vive*, Daly, but this is not the place to talk. I will tell you that I want you for the same type of federal investigation you've done so well for me twice before and that I'm calling on you because you're the only man I know in this country who combines the two things I must have plus a third that may be necessary. You can still deal the cards, I suppose?"

"With a little practise, sir."

"Good. Another thing I want—"

"Well, Duke, give us the dope!"

It was Jake, the tout. Daly introduced the two men, and Graves said:

"That's right, it's time to be thinking of the Derby. So far as I can see every one of those million-dollar beauties has a chance."

"I never seen such a card!" lamented the little Jew. "Whaddaye think I done in the last race? Got toued offa Flyin' Heels and bet that War Cry dog! He ain't finished yet, an' Flyin' Heels win in a walk!"

"You've got no business betting," Daly told him, and his smile could be called a genuine grin now and not a slight widening of the mouth. "Well, I'll lend you ten bucks to play Peach Pie in the Derby."

"Are yuh crazy?" barked Jake. "With Butterfly an' Harwell an'—"

"Peach Pie has never won a race," Graves remarked, looking at the tout's form sheet.

"I know it," said Daly. "But I've seen Peach Pie run four times up to a mile and seventy yards. He's a strong-headed horse, and every time he's had an apprentice boy up who couldn't handle him at the barrier. And he's a bad actor. Every time I've seen him race he's been last by about three lengths on the backstretch, and at the finish, from nowhere, the horse is always second or third. Today he's going a mile and a quarter, he's got Garry Craven up on him and he's horse enough to win."

"——, it'll be like throwin' money away!" wailed Jake.

"Suit yourself. But my roll goes down—hook, line and sinker on Peach Pie, and I'm mistaken if he doesn't pay ten to one at least."

Graves looked at Daly curiously. The Duke was talking with quiet assurance and betraying detailed knowledge of still another kind than Graves had known about. Long ago he had been surprized at the range of Daly's reading and his retentive memory. Now he seemed to give the impression of a man who had made horses an exclusive life study.

"I'm satisfied," Graves said. "I'll parlay my winnings on Flying Heels."

"I'll string along," said Jake sadly. "Can't do nothin' else. But with twenty-three o' the best stake horses in the world, every one of 'em a winner of at least one stake as two-year-olds or three-year-olds, bettin' on Peach Pie is shootin' way over the moon!"

"I'll bet for all of us," said Daly. "You get your money, Mr. Graves, and I'll lay it for you. And ten for you, Jake."

Which he did. And, being a gambler, he went the limit for himself. He occasionally really bet when there was good reason. He bet four hundred dollars, practically all the cash money he had, for himself.

The three were fortunate in wedging to the rail as twenty-three of the finest three-year-olds in America danced down the track in the parade. Royally bred, beautiful as—to a Kentuckian, at least—no other living thing except a woman, a million dollars' worth of equine aristocracy pirouetted before the grandstand. Not a one of them could walk or merely trot. And as they passed, that mighty crowd cheered hysterically. The greatest sporting classic of the American turf was about to be run, and fifty thousand dollars was at stake, but that was the least important feature of it all. The unbeaten Harwell, Gray Face, futurity winner, Baby Sue, holder of a world's record—all were there, and astride them the premier jockeys of America had forgotten to be blasé. Daly watched the stubby, short-barrelled Peach Pie with Garry Craven crouched on him. The horse was an unimpressive, heavy-set black, wearing white blinders. It didn't seem possible, and yet he was a marvelous stretch-runner, and Craven was the finest hand-rider in the country. At times he was as good an all-round rider as Sande.

He took out his field-glasses as they lined up down at the stretch turn. When Jake got through praying for success he said—

"Keep your heads close and I'll call the race for you."

He knew the colors as well as any chart-caller up in the press stand.

"Craven's handling him. He's bucking a little and they're taking him to the outside. An assistant starter's got his head. Hope he doesn't hold on too long. Harwell just kicked Grayface. That's a big field. They're off!"

He said it a split second before the roar of the crowd. At no other time in the world is that same cry to be heard—sixty thousand throats, yelling the same thing at the start of a sporting classic such as the Derby. There was a wild thunder of hoofs as the horses, stretched all the way across the track, rushed down toward the stand.

It was impossible to tell positions until they reached the stand. Fugitive was in front, Harwell at his withers, and in third place, four lengths back, was Peach Pie, with Craven low over his neck and holding him so tight that the little stallion's mouth was wide open as he fought for his head. The others were being hard held too, but Daly shouted at the top of his lungs into the two men's ears:

"The race is in! They can't beat him when he's that close to start!"

"How the —— did Craven ever get him up there on the rail from an outside position?" screamed Jake. "We got a chance, —— if we ain't!"

Daly did not answer. He did not use his glasses now. Those white blinders shone like a headlight as the field swept into the backstretch. Other riders were starting to make their moves now. Fugitive was going back and Harwell was taking the lead. Gray Face moved up to Peach Pie, and the field shifted rapidly. Daly put his glasses to his eyes and shouted his news through the bedlam. Jake and Graves, transfixed for the moment with the same passion, watched with their heads in front of Daly's mouth.

"Still third at the turn out of the stretch—mouth still open. Craven's saving ground, holding him tight to the rail and waiting for some horse to go wild. Fugitive's through. Peach Pie is second. He's let him down! He's moving up, but Harwell sticks to that rail like a sticking plaster. No chance to get through, Craven. Look at those horses moving up! Now Craven's let him all the way down. He's coming around Harwell!"

"There ain't no horse can beat Harwell down the stretch!" yelped Jake. "Where are they?"

"Watch those blinders!" Graves suggested evenly.

And watch them they did. The other horses were close on the leaders' heels now and coming like locomotives. But Peach Pie, low to the ground, ears laid back, ran with a curious heavy, plodding effect that camouflaged his speed. The big Harwell was being ridden with whip and heels, and doing his best.

"Even at the eighth pole. Peach Pie's just begun to run! A nose ahead!" yelled Daly and put down his glasses.

In the last sixteenth Peach Pie seemed to be going faster and faster. Opposite his three backers he was a half length ahead of Harwell, and Craven was giving him as beautiful a hand-ride as ever lifted a horse under the wire. Sixty thousand people went mad, and Jake was the maddest of them all, with Graves a close second, as open daylight showed between the two leaders.

Peach Pie won by two lengths, and at the last second Gray Face nipped the staggering Harwell for second place.

Jake was a babbling idiot, and Graves' face was like a shining full moon. He pounded Jake on the back and put his hat on backward. As the field came back to the stand and the great wreath of flowers was put around the sturdy little thoroughbred's neck and Craven's weazened, lined face was split from ear to ear with a happy, boyish grin, Graves came to himself as abruptly as if a curtain had dropped.

"What a race!" he breathed. "Daly, you seem to know something about a horse."

"There ain't no better!" gibbered the little tout. "Duke, I ain't never gonna forget this."

"Maybe you think I'm not relieved," smiled Daly. "It was a race, wasn't it? I'll bet it was run in close to two flat."

"2:02 even!" yelled Jake as the time went up on the board. "How much'll he pay, Duke?"

"Unless there was a late play on him, about twelve to one."

"Yahoo!" yelled Jake, and Graves smiled.

He had had twenty dollars up himself, and the government is not a liberal employer.

Peach Pie paid thirty-four dollars and twenty cents for a two-dollar ticket. Jake took his money, and his tough little face was a sight to behold.

"Duke, if there's ever anything I c'n do—"

"Sure, Jake. You're welcome. Bread on the waters, you know."

Which didn't mean anything to Jake. But, curiously enough, the ten-dollar loaf of bread which Daly cast on the waters that day for Jake returned to him a hundred fold. And not long thereafter, either.

III

AT SEVEN o'clock that evening Graves and Daly were ensconced at a very inconspicuous table at Louisville's most celebrated roadhouse. In the spring and summer it was hardly a roadhouse, either, for literally hundreds of tables were set out in the open, beneath the thick shade of a marvelous pine grove. In the center was a dance floor, whence a colored orchestra dispensed barbaric music. On a night like the night of the Derby when the moon rode high and the air was not too cool it was the place of places to dine.

The two men were tucked away in a corner in the shadow. Graves was dressed with his usual meticulous care in blue serge. He did not seem like the excited man of the

afternoon. Instead, he was cool and collected, and scarcely smiled. He had the power of concentration. Either he was entirely engrossed in business or he swept the manifold problems of his position and profession completely to one side and forgot them.

Since the afternoon he had been having a steady procession of conferences, the meaning of which or whom they were with Daly had not the slightest idea. The Duke was waiting patiently for detailed information from the federal man, and as he sat across the table from him his thoughts were far from the meal which was coming or the tables around him, crowded with Derby visitors. Nevertheless he gave no sign of his impatience, but waited with apparent unconcern. Dressed in gray trousers and dark coat, with a soft white shirt and bow tie, a casual glance at him would have labeled him as a youth in his late teens. Having dinner with his father, perhaps.

Graves ordered dinner, and no sooner had the waiter left than he plunged into his story. As always, under conditions like these, he talked in a forthright, terse manner which gave the impression of a man driving steadily toward a definite goal. His short, almost dogmatic sentences, spoken in that cultivated, well modulated voice of his, were like soldiers, marching and countermarching at his will. He sat motionless as he talked, hands clasped in front of him on the table, and his broad-browed, ascetic face underneath smoothly brushed gray hair was utterly placid. Those remarkable eyes rested steadily on Daly's face.

"I told you we have decided that the recent series of robberies through the Middle West are the work of one group of criminals or at least of allied groups of criminals. The federal forces are taking hold of the case because of the well founded belief that the organization deals not only in thefts of various kinds but also in smuggling, both of liquors and drugs.

"As you doubtless know, all these crimes have been committed within a comparatively small radius. Buffalo, Chicago and Columbus, roughly, are the limiting points of their operations. They are as daring, well-organized and clever a group of crooks, it seems, as I have ever had to deal with. And, so far as can be learned through the police of a dozen cities in the territory and a hundred out of it plus the investigations of an army of agents, the band is not composed of known crooks. Not of a class which would indicate the ability to plan or execute such crimes as this band has committed, at least. Furthermore, not a jewel or a fur or the few banknotes, the numbers of which are known, have these men attempted to get rid of anywhere in the United States.

"After careful study and investigation we have not advanced an inch. By 'we' I mean the forces of the law in general. In no case, in no city have the local police been able to find out a thing. The trail is completely covered. The federal forces have been at work for a week. I soon decided that we needed you.

"There is but one thing which we have decided upon so far. That is that the headquarters of the gang is near Detland. Detland is rather a central point of the territory in which they have been working. It is on the northern boundary, of course, of the territory, but the cities in which the robberies have taken place are all comparatively close to this central point. In addition, Detland is between two of the lakes, Huron and Erie, on the Canadian border."

The waiter approached with the food, and Graves ceased talking and turned to look at him. Instantly that hawklike profile leaped into being, outlined against the brighter lights of the dance floor a hundred feet away. It did not seem like the same face. Daly, who had been as motionless as the chief himself, never failed to get a shock at the difference between Graves' two faces, for that was what it amounted to. In profile there was something almost cruel about his countenance.

Daly said nothing. He lighted a cigaret and waited. No sooner had the waiter left the soup on the table than Graves began again, marshalling his statements with unhesitating, clear-cut accuracy. Every one, as he uttered it, was like a separate spike driven into the verbal structure he was building.

"It is not necessary for you to know the various reasons why we have decided that there is an excellent chance that the headquarters of the gang is in or near Detland. Sufficient to say that while robberies in other cities all showed accurate knowledge of conditions, there was nothing concerned in the preparations for them which an ordinary scout might not have been responsible for.

However, in the case of the capture of a large quantity of drugs from a smuggling cache in Eastland, a suburb of Detland, there was proof positive that the men who did it had detailed knowledge of conditions there and of the operations of the horde of smugglers in that county. The papers did not get it exactly. But they got too much. The gang cleaned up three hundred thousand dollars' worth of drugs in one haul, and it was made under conditions which absolutely prove the fact that they were thoroughly familiar with the conditions in the underworld of Detland."

"Conditions have been bad there for some time, haven't they?" said Daly.

"Very. For two reasons. One is a very large foreign population. In one suburb, populated largely by Poles, state troopers had to be called in to take charge of the city, the mayor impeached, the chief of police forced to flee and other things. The second reason is that Detland is right on the Canadian border, separated from Canada only by the very narrow river. That means smuggling.

"You'll find out the situation there for yourself. I will only tell you, to give you an idea, that along this river there are three towns in a row, comparatively small, the first one starting right at the outskirts of Detland and the third one less than ten miles from it. They are in a continuous line along the river. And at present they are populated and run by hundreds of bootleggers and rum runners. They are nests of crime. I will let you find out conditions for yourself. But here the underworld rules supreme—the new type of criminal which prohibition, heroin, the war and a foreign population which contains a considerable proportion of the dregs of the old world have brought about. We believe that somewhere in those towns there will be the lead which will guide us to the men whom we are after."

HE CEASED speaking and began to eat his soup unhurriedly. Daly, as was his wont, said little. To be entirely accurate, he said nothing, but merely waited.

After a few mouthfuls of soup Graves resumed again, exactly as if he had not stopped at all. Around them there was not a little gaiety, and even some excitement when a stout fellow, quite intoxicated, got into a fight with one of the waiters. The band was playing with comparative softness, but neither Graves nor Daly raised their eyes to gaze beyond their table. They were in a world of their own. Daly's mind was concentrated on Graves, and that gentleman, at a time like this, would have been unruffled if a new Verdun was being fought around him.

"I'm calling on you, Daly, for several reasons," Graves said quietly. "I'm sure of one and I think I am of another. First, of course, you've proved yourself an excellent man on this sort of work twice. I vividly remember the time when you had been a flying officer only a few months that I called you to Washington and set you on the trail of that rich draft dodger, Bergen, who'd gone to college with you. You got him. Later, when you and 'Tex' MacDowell rounded up that aerial smuggling ring down on the border, you did an even better job. Consequently, I have faith in you for this new emergency.

"But that isn't all. There are lots of able men, but I believe you have assets which I can not find elsewhere. They are my excuses for asking you to risk a great deal. Will you answer a few questions, frankly and in confidence?"

"Yes, sir," returned Daly, sitting like a statue and watching Graves with unwinking eyes.

"As I understand it you ran away from home when you were fifteen without a nickel. Trouble with your parents, was it not? Nothing disgraceful?"

"No, sir. The result of hot tempers in my father and I."

"Then what happened?"

"For two or three years I just about starved to death—hobo and all that."

"Nothing criminal?"

"No, sir, except that I caved in Bushy Brennan's skull with a log in self-defense."

Graves nodded. He knew that story.

"Then, as I understand it, you fell in with this old gambler, and he taught you to be a professional gambler, at which you showed great aptitude. You see, we've been investigating. I know, for instance, details about your career which you didn't mention when you and I and Tex talked out in the mesquite on the border that time. You told me about the time you shot young Jim Fitzpatrick and then left the border for the race-track.

"But, according to my information, while you were working along the border and around San Antone and El Paso, you were one of the most mysterious and respected characters in the underworld for very simple reasons. Your professional ability was high. But the main thing was that you kept to yourself, dressed, talked and acted like an educated gentleman and had no friends, not even Young. That interested and mystified your acquaintances. That's where you got the name The 'Duke,' I believe."

Daly said nothing. It was all true.

Graves' searchlight eyes seemed to play over the slim, youthful looking man before him for a moment, and then he said:

"It's beside the point, but I remember that when I first met you the range of your reading, from theatrical papers to the most intellectual reviews, was, to say the least, freakish and unusual. Your viewpoint on life was and still is the result of the fact that you developed in a hard school, and all by yourself, without friendship or guidance or any real contact with the things that really interested you. In other words, you laid in the mud and studied and thought about the sky."

It was a simple statement on his part and a diabolically accurate estimate of Daly's warped nature. Graves went on precisely as though a personal note had not entered the conversation even for a moment.

"I understand thoroughly that those months as a crook, Daly, were caused by exactly the same reasons as impels a starving man to steal a loaf of bread. Don't be self-conscious about them. Already you've tried to expiate them, and now you can turn them to such good account that the government itself can be glad you lived them so that you could do this job.

"From gambling you went to the race-track, and finally became betting commissioner for the Clover stable. You were a legitimate race-track man when the war broke, you enlisted in the Air Service, and stayed in it until that wreck on the border gave you your limp, and you were retired. That is all precisely true, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Now let's get something else as straight as we can. In the case of that border business and so forth. In the case of that border business I was impressed by the fact that all those New York actors and even the heads of the conspiracy immediately recognized you as Duke Daly. Out at the track today it was the same. Just how wide is your acquaintance with the underworld and, after that, the sections of society which, in a way, are familiar with the underworld? Such as the cheaper grade of race-track hangers-on?"

"As for the track, very well known," Daly answered quietly. "When I became financial agent for the Clover stable, my position was rather prominent. Almost as prominent, say, as a leading jockey. I think my name would be recognized at any track in the country by any veteran horseman, jockey, newspaperman or regular patron of the distinctly sporting world. Such as bookmakers, big bettors, prominent theatrical people—they're fiends on racing—and the like. Through this acquaintance with all kinds of people and because of the fact that a large number of criminals of all sorts gravitate to the race-track—it's their favorite sport—I think my name is pretty well known."

"I thought so. How many of them know that you were a professional gambler?" Graves went on remorselessly.

"Not a one of them knows anything about me from anything I've said."

"I see. Do you know whether or not any of the men with whom you once associated in your gambling days ever drifted north? The underworld has its own news."

"I imagine it's very likely, sir."

"It's not only likely. It's a fact," said Graves calmly. "As a matter of fact, we've investigated a bit, particularly in New York, to find out how much of a basis there was to build on. To build you into a sort of legendary character of the kind we want. People around various clubs in New York—the Friars, for instance—frequented by many men who are familiar with the track, remember you well, and we found out that several things combined to make you remain in their memories. One was your youth. Another was the fact that you never confided anything in any one. A third was that you were intelligent, well read and apparently of high social standing. By that I mean eligible for it, at least. Naturally, your position as representative of the biggest stable in the country was the spotlight which threw your other qualities into prominence.

"We found out that one or two newspapermen who knew you pretty well during your days around the New York tracks had heard vague rumors regarding a very colorful career you had had in the past. Possibly this came through underground channels from the south, possibly it was due to some story started without foundation by some one who couldn't figure you out.

"As a result of many things your aloofness as a gambler, your position on the track and other things, we have a foundation on which to build for you the reputation we want.

"We want to send you into the world of those three towns and Detland itself as Duke Daly, professional gambler, race-track man, the man who killed young Fitzpatrick in Mexico."

He took a mouthful of chicken, buttered a roll and then resumed:

"That's just a skeleton. We want to do more than that. Through the medium of various inspired newspaper articles the news will be broadcast around Detroit that Duke Daly is in town. And you won't know yourself. You'll be presented as one of the most mysterious and deadly gunmen and gamblers who ever waved their six-shooters in Texas. You'll be a man who has lived a life that could only be true in fiction. Without going into detail about it, you'll be consulted, of course, you'll make your arrival as a known aristocrat of the underworld.

"There'll be just enough truth in it to make your position solid. Just enough hard, concrete facts, easily verifiable, to convince the most skeptical crook that you are as presented. And with your ability as a gambler and ability to take care of yourself under any circumstances whatever you should be able to make good the screeds in the newspapers. Your object will be to worm your way, as an honored assistant or possibly leader, into the top stratum of Detland's criminals.

"After everything is over the true story will be broadcast, of course. And right at the start we'll shield you as much as possible by having it noised about in the newspapers and by word of mouth that Daly is not your right name. We'll give you another, and newspaper accounts will say that you were an orphan from Texas, say, grew up down there or something of the sort so that very likely Louisville will never connect you with the Duke Daly up in Detland at all. All the forces at our command will combine to press agent you vaguely but effectively, and by word of mouth the rumor will be started that the keenest, hardest, cleverest bad man seen around recently is in their midst.

"All this trouble will be taken to assist you in getting into that gang. In the first place it seems that it is made up of unusual men, not ordinary crooks or even known criminals. It will require an extraordinary man to break into it, I think, and perhaps no one could. But it is up to you, using all the forces that you will have at your command, including both our men and hangers-on whom you may attach to yourself to dig out something. Meanwhile, many other men will be at work all over the country. Get all you can, that will be your slogan, and anything that doesn't happen to be in our particular province which is dope in this case will be turned over to the proper authorities. How about it, Daly?"

THE Kentuckian's ordinarily cool mind was in a somewhat chaotic state. Graves did not interrupt his thoughts as several seconds passed without a word spoken by Daly.

It was a stunning proposition. He could see its points—and to him it was a compound of all that was desirable—and all that he hated with a hatred that passed understanding. He had become a professional gambler under the tutelage of an older expert. He had done it for the same reason, as Graves had said, that a starving man steals a loaf of bread. Considering the circumstances at the time, he had never been able to become properly shocked or disgusted with himself at the recollection. And yet, his years as a hobo, gambler and itinerant workman had taught him many things, and all were calculated to arouse a passionate hatred and repugnance in him. There was no misty illusion about genial knights of the road in his recollection of hoboing. It was a nightmare of cold, wet, starvation, obscenity. So far as the denizens of the underworld were concerned they were one and all double-crossing, sneaking thugs and nothing else. Every instinct in him was that of a sensitive, intelligent, cultured man, and it was the years he had spent in just such surroundings as Graves

pictured which had made him abnormal in many ways. All that went with a life of that kind made him recoil as if from something physically frightful.

"Another thing," came Graves' even voice. "On the border that time you found Young, your ex-gambling partner, to be one of the criminals you were after. He threatened to expose your past to the world, and only his death prevented your being disgraced throughout the Army, at least. I know how that affected you on account of your parents."

"They're both dead now," Daly said quietly, a shadow in his eyes. "Flu last winter. Within two weeks of each other."

An unasked question was in Graves' eyes, and Daly broke for the second time in his life his rule of silence about himself.

"They died happy as far as I was concerned," he said quietly. "They never knew anything about me that was too sordid."

For a moment there was silence, oppressive silence, Daly was thinking swiftly. And he knew what his decision would be. Graves' words came back to him with redoubled force, and suddenly his revulsion, like that of a burned child from the fire, disappeared. The call of Graves was a summons to a definite place in the world which he could fill, a filling of the unhappy emptiness of his life with a job that would be like an overdue payment to society for his past.

Furthermore, the call of the wild had never failed to find an answer in the heart of Mr. Robert Daly.

"I'm ready to do whatever you say, sir," he said finally, a leaping light in his wide-set gray eyes.

Suddenly he felt freer. There was an easing of what seemed like a months-old tension within him. There was a niche which he could fill.

"You realize that despite all our efforts you may be branded before the world as what you were and not what you are?" Graves insisted without emotion.

"Now that the folks are dead there's not a soul in the world but one for whose opinion I give a single solitary ——. And he'll understand."

Graves nodded, his face impassive.

"I'm not surprized," he said quietly. "As soon as we get back to town we'll go into all the details. Shall we leave?"

"I'm ready, sir."

"You'll have a hard row to hoe, Daly, and I know how you'll hate it. So I appreciate your willingness to help out."

Graves didn't elaborate that statement, and it wasn't necessary. His statements needed no adjectives to make them effective.

IV

DALY parked his little car some blocks from the hotel, which was a necessity, and they strolled down the thronged streets toward the central corner of town, on which corner was Graves' hotel. It was the leading hostelry of Louisville.

For a block on either side of it the race-track men were gathered. They stood around and gossiped, talking over the races of the day, reputed sleepers who would "go for the wad" later in the meeting and, in particular, they lived over every foot of the Derby. Peach Pie's victory had been a stunning surprize.

A short distance from the hotel Daly spotted Jake, the tout, and that bright-eyed, seamed-faced individual recognized the Duke.

"Listen, Duke," he called, and Graves' and Daly slowed up.

Jake joined them.

"Didn't know but what I ought t' tell yuh," he said. "Might be a friend o' yours or somethin'. Felluh comes up t' me right after I'd hopped in from the track and says t' me, 'Didn't I see yuh talkin' t' that felluh?' And he points t' you. You was just goin' intuh the hotel with this man here—I forget who you are—"

"Mr. Graves, Mr. Epstein," Daly introduced them. "Didn't I introduce you out at the track?"

"Yes, but I didn't want t' know nothin' but a horse out there," grinned Jake, richer than he'd been for years as a result of Daly's tip. "Anyhow, I says yes, you was an old friend o' mine. Then he says, 'Duke Daly, ain't it?' I says yes. And he wants to know what you're doin' now. I says I don't know. You know, I ain't spillin' the fact you're at home. Then he says, 'I wonder whether he's back on the track or not.' And I says I don't know, but suppose y'are. And I says if you ain't some stable's lost somethin' because you know horses an' how to bet 'em. And he says a funny thing.

" 'Yes,' he says, 'and he knows cards and how t' deal 'em and a gun and how t' shoot it—and other things!"

" 'Whaddaye mean?' says I, 'he's a friend o' mine.'

" 'He's a friend o' mine, too,' says he and grins, like."

There was a moment of silence. Suddenly it seemed to Daly as if an icy hand had gripped him. There was some one in Louisville who knew him well and the discreditable things about him. Well, that might come any time, but it was a shock.

"What sort of a looking man was he?" he asked quietly.

"About forty, say, and kind o' short and wide-shouldered with a kind of tough face. Irish mug it was. He had little blue eyes and when he grinned it went all over his face. And a little nick in his right ear."

"Mean anything to you?" inquired Graves, his eyes on Daly's contained face.

"Not a thing. Don't you know where he's hanging out or what he's doing in Louisville, Jake?"

"Nope. He just eases off, leavin' me with my mouth open. I didn't know you'd ever been a card man, Duke, although I heard here an' there some things when you was around. But this duck seemed to be hep to yuh some way, I'll swear he did. Thought yuh might like t' know. I ain't askin' nothin', but if you're in your home stable yuh might not want everything anybody's wise to peddled, get me?"

Daly nodded.

"Thanks, Jake."

As they moved off down the street there was a sinking sensation within him. No one, perhaps, could appreciate how it galled him to have a sneaking little tout feel at home with him and to have him say in all sincerity that Daly might want certain people to keep their mouths shut. It was an admission of the fact that Daly belonged in the crew of sharpers and sure-thing men, that there was a well understood bond between him and the class represented by Jake.

"Somebody knows you," Graves said quietly. "That may not mean much to any of us but you, but what did the unknown mean by adding that phrase 'and other things,' and then refuse to elaborate?"

"Maybe the little *soirée* we had on the border when I switched from one of the hunted to one of the hunters," Daly returned.

They went into the hotel, upstairs in the crowded elevator, and once inside of Graves' room that gentleman made his answer precisely as if no time at all had intervened between Daly's statement and his own.

"If any one at all knows, aside from government men, the crooks still in jail, and the flyers knows that, it may not only knock our whole scheme in Detland to pieces but put you in deadly danger," he said quietly. "However, one unknown man does not necessarily mean so much, but I'll get busy now and we'll see if by tomorrow we can't round up this man and see who he is and what he knows, if anything. We can't take any chances."

It took less than three minutes for Graves to get a number on the phone and give his orders. Those orders meant that every force of the law in Louisville was searching for a short, stocky man with a tough, Irish face and small, blue eyes and a nick in his ear and a wide grin, who was not a resident of Louisville. This much Daly was sure of. So somewhere in a rooming house or a hotel the man should be found on the morrow.

Then the two men talked—not only business but, at intervals, other things. It was a delight to Daly to converse with Graves because there was no subject in which he was interested that Graves could not talk intelligently about. As if realizing that relaxation was necessary at times to ease the fierce concentration with which they made their plans, Graves at intervals switched the subject to casual topics of general interest, and he and his protégé used a few minutes to smoke and talk. But always the secret agent snapped back into his line of thought, beginning just where he had left off and marshalling his facts in orderly array.

At four in the morning Daly started homeward. He was to leave for Detland in less than a week, giving a little time for Graves to get certain matters under way. As the tall young Kentuckian stood at the elevator he was so wrapped up in thoughts, half pleasant, half fearful, of the future that he failed to notice the delay for a while. He rang again, but the dial above the cage did not move.

It was only the third floor, so rather than wait longer he walked down. As he reached the lobby he glanced at the elevator with some curiosity. He saw the negro night

operator sitting within it and in the door which was open a white man was standing with his hand in his pocket. The lobby was practically deserted. A few men stood about, and there was one in the revolving door which was the entrance. Another was out on the front steps.

For a moment Daly was tempted to stop and reprimand the elevator boy. Then:

"What's the use," he shrugged. "Probably one of the bosses bawling him out or something of the sort.

He was plunged in such deep thought, for it seemed as if the course of his entire life had changed that day, that he was really in no condition to receive very sensitive impressions of what went on around him. He walked toward his car absent mindedly, thinking of the stranger in town who knew him, who could have ruined him a few months before when his parents were alive. Now he could move on, of course, but it might make him unavailable for the job up in Detland. Fat chance any man reputed to be connected with the federal government would have to worm his way into the three towns up along the border. If the man knew so much, probably his "other things" had meant Daly's work with Graves on that smuggling case on the border, and if one man knew it, no telling how many had heard it.

SUDDENLY he came to himself. Possibly his steady thinking about crime, past and present, caused his mind to make a sudden, instinctive jump. There had been something very peculiar back there in the lobby of the hotel. That elevator incident had been extremely unusual, and he recollected now how sharply some of those men had looked at him. By Jove, there had been no sign of a clerk behind the desk, either.

He got into his car and turned it. As he did so, a big black touring car swooped past him, roaring down the main street at a high rate of speed. The hotel was five blocks ahead. Joyriders, probably.

Daly's little runabout was going at a fair rate of speed itself because Daly had a germ of an idea in the back of his mind that something was afoot. Was it his overwrought imagination or had there been a queer tensity of feeling discernible in the hotel lobby?

Ahead of him the big car ground to a stop in front of the hotel. And seven men came out rapidly and got in. The next moment the car was off like a shot.

In that instant it seemed as though Daly knew exactly what had happened. There had been a systematic robbery of the hotel, and he had walked through the lobby while it had been going on. That had been a guard there on the elevator and others distributed around the lobby. Others had been going through the safety deposit boxes of the hotel—through the thousands of dollars' worth of jewels and money left with the hotel by the Derby crowd. And it looked like the work of the famous gang which he had been set to catch.

As he sent his small car after the big one, the accelerator down to the floor, he decided that it was his business to get the license number if he could. Then he saw a policeman looking up the street after that speeding touring car.

He skidded to a stop and gasped out his story.

"Turn in the alarm! I'll follow 'em and get the number if I can!" he yelled, and started off again.

In a moment the car turned a corner, and a few blocks farther on was headed for the Dexter Road. That was the road which led into Indianapolis. He was losing ground all the time, and he knew that he could never get closer than he was in a fair race.

But there was a short cut. The Dexter Road made a big bend, its course lying close to the river for a considerable distance. There was a maze of little country roads, and he knew a course which would save him nearly three miles. He saw the big car hurtle on past the corner, sticking to the smooth macadam.

He turned off and, at dangerous speed, sent his motor skimming over the soft dirt trail. By desperate driving he might be at the junction of the short-cut and the Dexter Road before the fugitive car. Maybe he could block the road so they couldn't get by.

It was a breath-taking ride for the highway he was following was not as smooth as a billiard table and it twisted and turned like a snake. But its general direction was straight across that big bend, and he had a chance to get to the junction first.

When he did arrive, he was certain that he must be there first. Unless they had covered more than three miles at a speed of

over sixty miles an hour—and the Dexter Road was full of turns too—he had beaten them. He set his runabout across the road and then posted himself high on the embankment of the sharp turn. If it was the bandit car, he'd let them roar around the curve and wreck. If it wasn't, he could warn whatever car it was.

But nothing happened. He waited five minutes without the sign of a vehicle. It did not seem conceivable that they could have passed before he arrived. Tense and strained, Daly crouched in the bushes and forced himself to wait.

Finally he knew there was no more hope. Perhaps there had been an accident. He got in his own car and started back for Louisville.

In a way he was bitterly disappointed, but in his heart he knew that if the police of Louisville had been prompt the news was out by now, and that the alarm was being broadcast. If those men depended on a car in that thinly settled territory, they came very close to being distinctly out of luck, he reflected.

Then ahead of him he saw the black bulk of a car alongside the road. It was fully a half mile down a long, straight stretch of macadam, but Daly's heart bounded within him. It was probably the bandit car. He forced himself to drive slowly, as if he was just a late motorist. The moonlight was bright and the road and the Ohio River at his right were plainly visible for some distance.

He stopped his car some distance from the dark bulk ahead and cut the motor. Getting out, he stole along toward the bandit car, keeping in the deep shadow of the shrubbery at his left.

Every atom of mental and physical energy was concentrated in his eyes—so much so that at first he did not notice the almost indistinguishable sound which came from behind the bushes. When he did, he stopped. There was something vaguely familiar in it.

"Sounds like a prop, but where's the motor?" he asked himself, and then, crouched low and moving slowly, he edged himself into the thin growth and parted it for a look.

At the edge of the field some fifty years to his left, there stood a huge airplane. One motor on each wing and another in the nose. The two wing motors were not running, their props standing motionless, but the extraordinarily large stick in the nose of the ship was turning over gently. Daly's narrowed eyes took in a number of details quickly. Underneath the ship, between the wheels of the undercarriage, there was a big pontoon as on a seaplane. Furthermore, there were pontoons on each wing and on the tail. It was an "Amphibian." The wheels and tail-skid could be drawn up into the fuselage when a landing on the water was necessary.

That, however, was not what caused the ex-flyer's body to stiffen with utter astonishment. There in the nose there was no visible motor to run the propellor and there was no clank of rockerarms or noise of exhaust as the stick turned. The tip of the prop described a circle of light as the moonlight reflected from its metal tips, and the mere suggestion of a low whining noise made the Kentuckian marvel still more.

His mind raced over possibilities. The bandit gang were using an airplane, an airplane with some new and mysterious effectiveness about it. There they were—closeted in the big, inclosed fuselage, ready to take off. And he had not even a gun.

A desperate expedient flashed into his mind. It was pure torture to have to stand and watch them escape. Anything was better.

HE RACED across the shallow ditch to his car. As in that moment years back on the border, when he had deliberately collided with another ship in the air to insure the successful culmination of that chase against criminals, he was utterly without fear. It seemed that life and death were unimportant things alongside an opportunity such as this. It was the result of his position, the thought in the back of his mind that doing the job he had been assigned to do would pay for all he had failed to do in his life. Getting the bandits was not particularly important. The world would wag on and he'd live on too. But his accomplishment of the task as a federal man was supremely important.

In a trice he had the motor running. Crabbing the wheels to their limit, he shot the car over the shallow, dry ditch, and straight for the thin line of bushes. The roadster hit them like a huge cannon-ball, and burst through.

As it hurtled into the field, the big ship was under way. Due to the noise of his own wideopen motor, Daly did not notice anything peculiar about the take-off of the ship.

He dragged the wheel to the right so that his course would intersect that of the ship, he hoped. The plane picked up speed surprizingly. It was going to beat him.

He was forced into more and more of a diagonal course to keep any hope of winning. If he could only smash into the plane—a wing, the big, two-ruddered tail-surfaces—they couldn't take off. He could race on in his car while they scattered and soon have them hunted down.

The side doors of the cockpit opened. He was racing almost alongside the plane now, nearly parallel to it and about ten yards away. And losing. Nose to the ground, it was flashing along like a thunderbolt. A hail of shots sprayed at him, but he was not hit. Somehow they seemed no more important than rain.

He was beaten. There was just one chance, perhaps.

Traveling at sixty miles an hour, the wheel almost torn from his grasp as the car sped over the comparatively rough terrain, he angled his roadster toward the ship abruptly. Leaning forward tensely as if to help it along, the accelerator slammed to the floor, he fairly reached for those tail-surfaces.

He missed them by a foot, and brought the car to stop just in time to avoid a wreck.

He sat there as the plane took the air. With his motor merely whispering, now, the flyer got out of the car to make sure that he was actually seeing what he thought he saw.

For it flew like a ghost. There was no audible sound whatever.

To Daly it was incomprehensible. There was a huge air-liner flying above him, and in place of the customary shattering roar of great motors there was eerie silence. Motionless, he watched it as it circled higher and higher. Not even exhaust flame. Finally it was in a light layer of fleecy white clouds. It wasn't going anywhere as yet. Just getting altitude. Then he saw it start northward and, in a moment, as the moon went behind a cloud, it disappeared completely from sight.

There could have been no sight on earth calculated to impress a flyer as profoundly as that. Daly was a rather exceptionally cool and collected person, but as he stumbled back to his car his mind was in a state of chaos. No wonder no one had known they were using a plane, and the plane was the reason for their uncanny ability to vanish from the face of the earth after the hue and cry had started.

Then an explanation struck him. He was half way back to town when he finally put together a few theories which seemed tenable.

"Those two motors on the wings were gasoline motors, making as much noise when they were running as any motor. That whine was like a big electric motor. I'll bet that front motor is an electric, with power enough to run 'em for a few minutes and get plenty of altitude. Then, when they're so high the drone of the others wouldn't be noticeable, especially at night when most people are asleep, they turn on the gas and fly at about fifteen thousand feet wherever they're going. But they get out of whatever town they're in without a bit of noise, and in an isolated field and on a dark night they can get away like so many mosquitoes—and about as much chance of catching them!"

It was graying into dawn now, and by the time he had reached the hotel it was morning. By that time Daly thought he could appreciate all the elements which had been working in favor of that band of aerial bandits. Probably their ship, manned with two regular motors as it was, was powerful enough to get to twenty thousand feet. And at that height, even in the middle of a clear day, neither the noise nor the ship would be obvious to any one on the ground. A good eye can peer through the sky for hours, knowing a ship is there, without picking it up at twenty thousand feet. And the hum of the motor, if it could be heard at all, certainly would be inaudible to the average ear. And most of their trips were taken in the darkness.

"They must have one of the greatest pilots in the world at that," soliloquized Daly as he strode into the lobby. "Night flying a big ship without any sort of light on strange fields!"

The lobby was filled with policemen and half dressed guests who had heard the news. Daly wasted no time. He avoided talking to any one, and in a moment was knocking on Graves' door. That gentleman was up, dressed, and using the phone.

"Wait a minute," he said sharply to the man at the other end. "Daly, you reported this robbery to a policeman on the street, didn't you? What did you find out?"

He was cool and calm in his chair, and his terse sentences were even and unhurried. In a few words Daly explained what had happened.

"Using an airplane, noiseless, close to the ground. Flying high and northward toward Detland. Three motors. Broadcast it. Have every one looking up all along the line and trying to pick out a plane that's very high. Detland warned particularly, of course. Call you again in a few minutes."

Graves put the receiver back with a click, and his clear eyes were tranquil and cool.

"If we don't get them tonight, we'll have you equipped with some of the best ships procurable. And we'll have Tex MacDowell along with you up in Detland, so that another time when these chaps drop around anywhere on business they won't have the sky to themselves. We'll have every flying field in the area—Dayton, Selfridge, Rantoul—keep a guard, and when the next onslaught comes, the night sky'll be as full of planes as it ordinarily is of birds. Do you think they saw you before taking off?"

"Not me personally. It was dark, and I was moving fast."

"Good. I hope we get them today. If we don't it's the climax of their operations. It shows how helpless we are on the ground."

"Did you say that Tex MacDowell was coming?"

"Now that we know, Tex will be called up here, and once again you two can work together. Does that please you?"

For just a second the look of the man-hunter was gone and warmth came into those impersonal eyes. Daly drew a long breath.

"He'd be good company, sir," Daly said, and then his expressionless face broke into a wide grin, and suddenly his eyes were glowing.

"We'll know by noon," Graves told him quietly. "Go home and get some sleep. I have a lot to do."

That was all. But Graves knew, and Daly knew he knew what the prospect of working with the only other friend he had in the world meant to him. The tall, drawling, competent Texan meant friendship to the lonely Duke in a way that even Graves' companionship did not. For Graves was older, more like a father. And Tex was a friend, the only one.

With this to be added to the fiery urge toward excitement and the fierce joy of the chase which had been born in Daly, it is no wonder that in his innermost being he could not feel heartbroken because thick clouds obscured the sky by nine o'clock and that the bandit ship vanished as completely as if it were a cloud burned away by the sun. That night Graves sent telegrams, and one was to Lieutenant Lee MacDowell of the border patrol. Others were to his chiefs in Washington.

And Duke Daly was a new man. For the moment none of the repugnant features of the work ahead meant anything. He had thought that life would flow on in even monotony, which he hated, and without a single element, personal or impersonal, which would supply the two things he wanted above all others. The protective shell which he had been forced to develop was too hard and thick to allow him to show the fierce desire for friendship which his years of lonely living had developed in him and which, in all his life, had been satisfied but once. Now he and Tex MacDowell were to work together. Surely the past would be wiped away in his own mind, at least. And with Tex to help him, no matter what the results to him personally might be, he would enjoy even the sacrifice of himself.

V

TWO weeks later Daly was standing in the Detland Union Station. Dressed in tweeds, as usual, and gray hat, his costume complete from the gloss on his oxfords to the gloves in his hand, it is doubtful if any person in the crowded station would have believed an informant who told him that the tall young fellow at the gate was the man whose supposed career had been the subject of a long feature article in the last Sunday's magazine section of the Detland *News*. Likewise, the cause of several more or less vague stories in the evening papers of Detland.

Particularly, because for the moment Daly's eyes had lost their shadows and were glowing with anticipation.

Funny how he and MacDowell had pulled so well in double harness, he was thinking.

Tex was a drawling, keen southwesterner whose life, despite a good education, had been largely one of action. He had never become seriously concerned in any way with intellectual affairs. All the things which Tex had given to Daly, principally an understanding and sympathy and deep liking for Daly himself which had nothing to do with anything but the personality of the Kentuckian, had been counterbalanced on Daly's side with a similar admiration. The fact that Tex was the most famous of the border patrolmen, the son of a wealthy father and more or less well known throughout the country had nothing to do with Daly's instinctive fondness for him. And whereas Tex with his normal, healthy outlook on life and his sane common sense had been a balance wheel to Daly's fierce cynicism, the ex-gambler had brought to Tex an appreciation of the meaning of many things in life which the Texan had never given any thought to. Daly, who read voraciously and was as much interested in the latest scientific discovery as he was in a poker game or the leading three-year-old of the year, had been a constant source of mental stimulation to MacDowell. And Daly realized it.

He'd never forget the time down on the border when he deliberately told MacDowell about his past. He had done it in an effort to test Tex, to find out whether the quality of MacDowell's friendship was as shallow and unreal as that of others had been. Daly had never found any one who had stood the test of misfortune. When Daly could do them no good, he was forgotten. And when he could, he was fawned upon. He had deliberately made the years before blacker than they were when he had talked to Tex, and concluded by saying:

"Now you know the lay. You can take it or leave it, just as you like."

And the Texan had answered casually:

"What the —— do I care what you were, as long as I'm sure you're a square-shooter and I happen to enjoy the pleasure of your society? Forget that stuff, Duke. Let's eat."

That had been all. And somehow the memory of that hour when he had deliberately tried to find out whether he had found a friend or not was the most vivid thing in Daly's mind as he saw in the rear of the crowd a tanned face which showed plainly above the heads of the oncoming people. Tex was in civilian clothes, his soft hat set carelessly on his head and his soft white shirt setting off the brown of his face in startling fashion.

He spotted Daly from some distance away, and the wide mouth, with its droop at the corners, got still wider as Tex smiled the one-sided smile which Daly remembered so well.

The big Texan—he was well over six feet and possessed a pair of shoulders which made his height seem less than it was because they were so wide—dropped his bag and thrust out his hand.

"Hi, Duke," he drawled, his gray eyes smiling. "You're looking almost as good as though you'd been on the border."

"'Lo, Tex," Daly returned casually. "I'm sure glad to see you. Come on. My car awaits without."

"Got the Government seal all over it?" queried MacDowell.

Daly laughed, which he rarely did, and returned—

"It might be safer, at that."

They ensconced themselves in Daly's little roadster, and then MacDowell remarked:

"So we chase the festive crooks hither and yon, do we? Say, Duke, I don't know much about the lay up here, but waiting to find out made that ride from McMullen seem about eight years long. Don't tell me now. This traffic makes me nervous. Keep your mind on your work. But get ready to tell me a lot *pronto* when we get home. Graves here?"

"No, he was called to Washington, but I'll give you the dope."

"I sure like the idea of this excursion," remarked Tex.

Daly grinned as he looked sideward at the lean face of his companion. If there was one thing which might be said to be the sole aim of MacDowell's existence, it was excitement.

Shortly after they reached the comfortable little apartment Daly had rented for them, the Duke was engaged in giving Tex a sketch of the situation. After describing the robberies which had supposedly been the work of the air bandits, he went into detail about what he had seen at the field in Louisville.

"It seems probable," he concluded, "that their headquarters are close to Detland, and well hidden. A thousand men have been trying to find out where they

keep their plane, and the Canadian authorities are helping. So far there's no clue. But that plane flew north that I saw, and they pick on Detland regularly.

"Now this stranger in Louisville that knew me is evidently one of the bunch. On the roundup which was started to find him, he was traced down to a room in the hotel at Louisville. That was the day after the robbery. And he was one of three men who were registered there the day before the Derby in rooms reserved for over three months in advance, who disappeared completely the night of the crime."

"That seems to indicate that they might be concerned," granted Tex. "Don't have any idea who he could be, eh?"

"Nary one. And the point is, does he know, along with other things, that I was in that little shindig down on the border and that you and I caught those dope smugglers? Either he was on the border in my gambling days or he saw me somewhere else and somebody told him a bookful about me. He's in the gang. If we should happen to join that gang—"

"Is that the plan?"

"It might work out that way. If it does, will all our carefully prepared reputations and all that go to pot because he suspects and tells the rest that we're probably just posing as outlaws?"

Tex got up and took several turns up and down the room.

"What does Graves think?" he asked finally.

"He doesn't think that there's a chance that anybody knows how closely we were concerned in that little *soirée*. There was no publicity, you know, about personalities. The entire border patrol turned out and caught 'em. And as far as that is concerned, as long as I was in the army I could have done my share and still be going back to my former habits now that I'm out. Do you see?"

"Uh-huh. But it's taking a chance, of course."

"Sure. But we've got a good start. Before outlining to you what Graves figured out for us let me tell you this. There've been articles in every Detroit paper—I'll show 'em to you later—about us. They're all to the effect that Duke Daly and Bret Hanson—that's your name—are—but wait a minute. Here's a sample. This was in last night's paper."

HE DREW a newspaper from the rack and pointed out a double column head on the front page.

RUMORED THAT DALY HAS PURCHASED LAND IN DETLAND

Well Known Border Gambler Plans to Make Detland his Permanent Residence, Police Believe

The Three Towns, to say nothing of the underworld of Detland proper, have something new to think about, if reports in the hands of the police are correct. They believe that "Duke" Daly and his right-hand man, Bret Hanson, famous soldiers of fortune who are known from one end of the border to the other, have purchased a house in Detland, the location of which the police do not care to give out at this time.

Daly, whose career in Mexico and on the border was climaxed by the killing of Jim Fitzpatrick, noted killer, in Laredo, Texas, has been reported to be in Detland for the last two weeks. Although Daly and Hanson, both Texans, have never been convicted of a crime, they are suspected to have been the powers behind the throne in huge smuggling operations over the Mexican border. They are reputed to have delivered over a hundred thousand rifles into Mexico and to be the most successful combination ever operating in the southwest.

The report of their arrival here caused considerable excitement in the Three Towns. If they settle here permanently, it is safe to say that there will be a new lineup of forces among the rumrunners and criminals of the river towns. Daly will be closely watched by the authorities, the police state, if he is found in Detland, but he and his partner seem to have an uncanny faculty of keeping out of trouble. Both are reputed to be the fastest gunmen seen in Texas since the days of the old masters in the eighties and nineties, and their accomplishments range from gambling to organizing huge enterprises of an illegal type. Daly's presence in Detland, police say, will mean that he intends to take a hand along the river. If so, and he lives up to his past performances, the authorities are scheduled for a busy winter. And possibly some of the higher-ups in the Three Towns will find a new factor in the field worthy of their best efforts.

"Well I'll be ——!" stated Tex. "If that isn't a peeler! So that's the sort of huckleberries we are, eh?"

"Exactly. And there's a lot more of the same. You remember me telling you about the time I shot young Jim Fitzpatrick when he killed that old nigger in cold blood? Well, that's been published as a Sunday feature story, all dressed up, of course. Describes Jim as fastest gunman on border, which he was, and then it says I beat him to the draw, which I didn't, of course.

"No one story has it all. In some of them we're supposed to have bet fortunes on the horses and all that stuff. We're big plungers, play poker with the sky as the limit, and in general are all-round fair-haired boys. We're described as always fair to our pals and that sort of thing. Some time you'll enjoy reading 'em for some good laughs.

"The object of it all is for us to make a dent on the criminal world so that we can get all the information there is. Some'll be used to clean out that stinking cesspool over there. ——, you never saw such a bunch of lowdown, sneaking, slimy criminals in your life. The riffraff of the world, Tex. I've laid low, but I've seen enough to make me sick. They're the scum of the earth.

"The main object, though, is to get dope on the airplane gang. They're making the law look sick. And that narcotic robbery in the Three Towns was a dead give-away. That is, it's a cinch that they got inside information from somebody in the Three Towns, and —— confidential information at that. Somebody over there is connected with these fellows, and our object is to be the big bugs of that section and find out everything we can. The fact that we're flyers hasn't been published at all, and we hope it won't be found out. There's just enough truth in those stories to keep any one who ever happened to know me on the border from branding the yarns as fakes, you see. But if we can keep the fact that we're flyers quiet, it'll help. We've got two S.E.5s with two —— good mechanics hidden over close to the Three Towns in case we can use 'em, but we'll never go near them until something breaks. There'll always be a mechanic there and they'll always be ready to go at a minute's notice."

"Graves wrote me there'd be ships. If this gang shows up we'll chase 'em, eh?"

"Yes. And there's not a field or a stretch of water where a ship could land that isn't watched. Same way in other towns within their radius of action. You'll notice that the fact that they use a plane hasn't been published. We don't want to let 'em know that we have any idea about their methods."

"Seems to me a long shot," drawled Tex, his long length eased back in his chair. "They may not work around Detland for a long time."

"Sure. But maybe we can overcome that. Trying is all we can do, anyway. Remember we're figuring that somebody that amounts to something and knows a great deal about smuggling operations in the Three Towns is in their pay. Maybe one of 'em. Our job is to plant ourselves as big men first. We'll go right to headquarters to start and this very night make a call on Mr. Corny Jasperson, who comes the nearest to being the big toad in this puddle. The federal men have been working for months to get the dope.

"This bird Jasperson seems to represent a syndicate of some kind which handles a lot of stuff. He represents some Canadian breweries—nominally and probably actually. But it looks as if the gang he represents on this side of the river handles most of the stuff that's smuggled. As near as we can find out, he doesn't dabble with getting the stuff across at all. But after it is across —aliens, dope, and liquor—the bunch he works with evidently take it over from the smugglers for cash and attend to the distribution of it. Of course he has a political drag, must have a lot of protection and all that stuff. Now the way we'll work—"

And for two hours they talked plans and methods, and Daly gradually revealed to Tex all the information which a swarm of federal operatives had placed in his hands. Later a half dozen operatives called, one at a time, and finally Tex understood the lay of the land. As the wide-shouldered, soft-spoken Texan sized up the ordinary looking group of operatives his gray eyes danced with enjoyment and appreciation.

After they had left, though, his lean face became serious and his eyes held a curious light in them as they met Daly's.

"Listen, Duke," he said gently. "Remember that time on the border when you found out that the old gambler you'd worked with was one of the gang we were out to get and he put it up to you to either lay off the bunch or else be press-agented to the world as an ex-crook instead of an army officer?"

Daly nodded.

"Looks like you might be up against some more of the same here. All this newspaper stuff—"

"Perhaps," agreed Daly quietly.

Tex said no more. But he understood. And Daly knew he understood. Which was one of the reasons why he was not unhappy or afraid as the chase started.

VI

AT TEN o'clock that night the two flyers were bowling down a quiet paved street ten miles from the center of Detland. They were bound for Mattie Hilliard's place; rather, one of Mattie Hilliard's places.

"Doesn't look like much of a town, any more than the last two did, eh?" suggested Daly.

"As peaceful as a graveyard," agreed Tex, surveying the rows of ordinary frame dwellings which lined the wide street.

Two car tracks split it, running into Detland, and there was scarcely a sign of life in its whole length. The river was less than a quarter of a mile to the north, and occasionally it could be glimpsed as the car passed a side street.

Daly laughed.

"Three out of four of these houses are joints," he told Tex. "A lot of 'em are connected with secret passages and all that stuff you read in fiction. A few blocks on down this street swings close to the bank of the river, and there the real big stuff starts. But even here, as I say, these houses are speak-easies, smugglers' headquarters, chippy joints and all the rest of it."

A few blocks farther where the thoroughfare ran close to the water there was more activity. Muffled noises of pianos, singing, and blaring bands, reached their ears. The river was lined with boathouses, and many cars stood parked at the curb.

"I saw the chief of police down at the river my first afternoon out here," Daly remarked. "He was in full uniform, drunk as a lord and collecting a dollar a case as his split from the smugglers. There are at least a hundred fast motor boats within a stretch of three miles, running night and day. And the enforcement agents have one patrol boat!"

"Must be a lot of bozos interested in the business," remarked Tex, and in the darkness Daly could see the well remembered flame in his eyes which indicated that the Texan was enjoying prospects.

"Thousands," Daly nodded. "Between smuggling, selling and transporting, representatives of bootleggers from three or four states and all that, this stretch of country has as large a proportion of criminals as the average jail. Well, here we are. Remember now—grandstand to the limit and all that stuff. You're a silent gunman from the wide-open spaces, and we can't be buffaloed!"

The car had turned into an alley alongside a two-story wooden building. On the right side of the alley was what seemed to be a vacant lot. Down toward the river at the lower end of the lot were what appeared to be a group of bathhouses on stilts. At the edge of the river itself there was a big wooden structure, tightly closed. To one side of that, set farther from the river, was a small house. Various sheds almost hid the river.

From the alley Daly turned across the lot, following a road and ended up alongside the small house at a side door. Not a gleam of light from the house or a sign of life in the whole scene. Out on the street, though, several cars were parked and others stood around in the lot.

Daly glanced around and, before snapping off his lights, dimmed them three times. From one of the cars there was a momentary flash of light.

"They're here," Daly remarked. "Probably won't need 'em, though. Well, here goes. Seems kind of foolish to do it this way, doesn't it, when we could have got in through somebody else? But it all helps to make us tough birds, and that's what we want."

He was aware of pleasant tingles up and down his spine and a certain breathless anticipation which added greatly to the desirability of life.

He rang the bell, and in a moment a small light above their heads flashed on. Both, however, were standing so that their faces could not be seen.

The door opened into a dark hallway, and a white shirt was visible in the gloom.

Instantly the two stepped in the doorway.

"We want to see Corny Jasperson," stated Daly succinctly to the man. "My name is Daly, Duke Daly."

"Huh?"

It was a grunt of surprize, which made it certain that the effort to press-agent both of them had borne fruit.

The man's face was merely a vague splotch in the gloom. He seemed to hesitate for a moment as if at a loss. Then he said:

"You got the wrong place, mister. I don't even know any Jasperson."

Daly had been standing quietly, his arms folded and one hand thrust beneath his coat. Without an instant's hesitation he jerked it out, and the next second a gun was digging into the man's side.

"Oh, yes, you do, and he's on the house-boat now," he barked. "You'll take us in there, understand? And don't be worried. We're not after trouble, but we're going to see Jasperson! Get some light if you want to and take a look at us!"

The man, without a word, led the way down the hall and opened a door. It led into a kitchen, lighted by one unshaded bulb. Apparently out of his wits with fear, he turned slowly and looked them over.

To Daly's surprize he was very young, with a pair of rat-like eyes and an ingrowing chin below bright red hair.

"Now lead the way, mister, and no more monkey business," commanded Daly. "We're safe, and Matty won't regret the visit!"

The doorkeeper tried to protest, but Daly cut him short viciously.

"Another word and I'll crack you over the head with this and shoot my way in!" he stated savagely, and Tex had to turn his head to avoid grinning.

His face pale and his eyes darting around wildly, the young fellow led the way into a sort of shed in the rear of the kitchen; then down some steps and into a littered cellar. He opened the door of what appeared to be a plank coal bin, and at the very rear of it another which led into a passage.

Daly had explained the layout to Tex, having gotten it himself from the federal men. The passage connected with the house next door and likewise, somewhere along its length, had a concealed door which led into a huge underground cache which opened on the river. Soon the federal men would swoop down on it, but not until Daly and Tex were through with their work.

The passage was not long, but Daly could not discover the secret door. It had been well camouflaged. They went up another flight of steps, and the guide knocked on another door.

"Not one word out of the way," Daly reminded him. "Tell our names, though!"

The door opened, and the seamed and lined face of a fat old woman was outlined in the light. Evidently there had been assurance in the knock, for she had not hesitated.

Daly stepped forward, jerking his head to Tex, who drifted over to their frightened guide.

"We're here to see Corny Jasperson. My name is Daly. Duke Daly. And don't try to keep me out!"

Behind the slatternly woman, slatternly in spite of being overdressed in a bright blue evening gown, was a small cellar room, absolutely bare and brightly lighted. It was lined with shelves that were empty.

Daly's gun had disappeared now, and he waited quietly for what the old woman might do. This would be a test.

"Certainly, dearie!" she said suddenly, and her face held a mechanical smile. "And this would be Hanson, eh? I know yuh by your looks, both o' you boys. We been hearin' about yuh. Come right in."

And she waddled across the cement-floored room. The doorman shut the door into the passage and evidently went back to his post.

She opened another door, clumsily hidden by shelves which swung with it.

"Straight ahead, boys," she told them. "I'll be in in a minute, soon's I get loose from here. Up the steps and across to the boat."

"Everything's all right!" Daly whispered to Tex. "There's an electric button there by the door she'd have pushed if there was anything wrong. Two of the federal men've got in here told her what we looked like and all."

THE flight of steps was short, and at the top of them was a short passage. The cold breeze showed that it opened on the water. The door at the end was closed, but it opened to the touch, and they found a narrow wooden bridge at their feet set three or four feet above the river. The door was covered on the outside with thick bushes which had been tied to it.

"That's the house-boat. Looks calm and peaceful, eh?" whispered Daly as they started across the bridge. "They say they can swing this bridge loose in a second. The house we just came from never has anybody passing in and out, and if a raid was tried from the first one, they say that every bit of evidence would have disappeared by the time the raiders could get through. Those doors—notice how thick they were? Got steel in the middle of the wood, and there's

a signal system and all that. On the boat they keep their stuff in a steel thing, they say, that can be dropped through the bottom into the river in jig time. Dope parties and everything else out here."

There was no bell at the door which led into the house-boat, but the two flyers were not more than half-way across before it opened. The sudden rectangle of light was almost a shock in the dense darkness. A waiter in a dirty white apron waited for them and looked at them curiously as they passed.

The next moment they were in the café. Perhaps twenty small tables filled the room, and every one of them was occupied. The air was so thick with smoke that for a moment it was sickening. It was easy to understand why. The room was in the lower part of the boat and so tightly closed around the sides that not even a glimmer of light betrayed it to any one passing.

Daly, outwardly as cold as ice, was nevertheless aware of the fact that from this moment on their work was cut out for them. Federal men in boats were outside in case of trouble, but they probably could not get in in time to save the two strangers in the event of trouble.

This was no ordinary speak-easy where well recommended slummers were welcome. It was a rendezvous for the higher class denizens of the river. Here they met to transact their business with each other, buy their "molls" a few drinks, and relax in general. Two-thirds of the patrons were men, the rest women of all degrees. Some were expensively dressed and young and good looking. All, however, were alike in one respect—no one could mistake them for sheltered débutantes.

Perhaps it was his imagination, but Daly thought that the noise died away considerably as they entered. Certain it was that every eye in the place was on them as they stood before the door. As it happened, both flyers were dressed quietly in blue serge. Daly was as immaculate as an actor ready for the stage. Tex, with his mahogany skin contrasting boldly with the white of his shirt and his lean length towering in the low room, looked to be just what he was—an outdoor man to whom such surroundings as these were strange.

Strangers were unknown at Mattie's place unless escorted by some one well known. So there were whispers and nudges and stares. It seemed as if every one was waiting tensely for something to happen.

The waiter motioned toward a small table which was occupied by two men, but Daly shook his head. His voice, purposely, carried clearly through the room.

"We're here to see Mr. Jasperson. Where is he?"

Now there was dead silence. The men, ranging from flashily dressed and bejewelled city types to roughly clad, low-browed men who might have been fresh from a trip across, let their eyes rest unwinkingly on the newcomers. Daly could fairly feel their unasked question: Who were the two unknowns who had calmly appeared in Mattie Hilliard's? New factors along the river? Prominent gunmen from some other city?

Daly caught several eyes flickering over to a corner table where four men were sipping long drinks. At the other tables small straight drinks were the order of the night.

The waiter seemed to be hesitating.

"Well? Where is he?" snapped the Duke.

The waiter gestured to the corner table. In that eerie silence which pervaded the formerly noisy place, the two flyers walked to the table.

Daly could pick out Jasperson from the description he had had of him. He was sitting well back from the table, a tremendously fat man with a round, genial face, small, piglike eyes and an air of ruddy well-being. He was dressed richly in brown, and from brown and green tie to polished shoes he breathed prosperity. One huge diamond in his tie and another in a ring were all that indicated the flashiness of his type. His head was partially bald, and a wide, dome-like forehead looked even larger than it was because of his lack of hair.

His small eyes, encased in flesh, were very bright as they rested on the two strangers approaching him. Daly, thinking swiftly, decided that continued grandstand plays were in order. So he talked loud enough to be heard by the élite of thugdom around him.

"Jasperson?" he inquired.

The fat man nodded, his eyes roving from MacDowell's face to Daly's.

"My name is Daly!" said the Duke clearly. "Duke Daly. This is Bret Hanson. And we want to see you for a minute —alone."

MacDowell's glowing eyes swept the room

quickly, and Daly stole a glance around. He was satisfied. The announcement of their identity had created a large-sized, if quiet, sensation. Every table was talking excitedly, as hard eyes darted between the two men. They were reminding each other of all they had heard about the pair of them, doubtless. Every person in the room was a spectator, and they forgot their own affairs to watch.

Jasperson nodded. He did not introduce them to the three men at his table, but Daly looked them over quickly. A stout man with eyeglasses, a little black-haired, ferret-eyed Italian and a stocky fellow with a pug nose and a tough Irish face.

Suddenly Daly's gray eyes seemed to freeze as they encountered the stranger's small, light blue ones. There was a queer light in them, a light of recognition. Sure of what he'd find, Daly glanced at the man's ears.

There was a tiny nick in the right one. It was the man that the tout had talked to in Louisville. And Daly, he was positive, had never seen the Irishman in his life.

Nevertheless, there was a man who knew him, and instantly the possibility of their plans being wrecked and of deadly personal danger was like a shadow which had been dropped over the room. What did the Irishman know? Did he recognize him from the old days before the war or did his words to Jake, "a gunman and a lot of other things," mean that he knew Daly as an army flyer who would help break up a border smuggling ring?

Daly glanced at Tex. The big Southerner was lounging easily, saying nothing, but his eyes were on the Irishman. As they met Daly's gaze they seemed to be leaping pools of fire. Tex scented danger, and was in Paradise.

IN A second Daly had made up his mind to take a chance. It might as well be threshed out immediately. It was better to know where he stood than to go about the business with a shadow hanging over him.

"This fellow's face seems familiar to me," he said evenly, gesturing toward the Irishman. "Haven't I seen you around somewhere? Ever been on the border or in Mexico?"

The stocky man's face widened in a grin.

"That's funny," he stated with a slight brogue. "I've been there, and I seen ye, but I never met ye. And when ye bumped off young Jim Fitzpatrick, mister, ye shure did me a fa-vor!"

He did not go into detail concerning what the favor was. Probably he and the son of famous old Dave Fitzpatrick had had a feud of some kind.

"Wasn't you in Louisville fur the Derby?" pursued the Irishman.

"I never miss one!" stated Daly.

"I asked a fr'ind o' yours, a little Hebe, whether it wasn't you, and I come near speakin' to ye. Them was great days back in 1916!"

Try as he would for the next minute, Daly could discern no slightest trace of suspicion in the man's attitude. It was not strange that a man in the border underworld should have heard of Daly, not that he should have seen him.

It did not take the Duke long to decide that he was justified in taking a short cut to their goal. If this man was connected in any way with the air bandits weeks of work could be left out. It was obvious that he was close to Jasperson, which led to many possible complications. Nick-ear had been found and could be shadowed; more than that, time need not be wasted in establishing the position of Tex and himself in the Three Towns. The plan which had been considered as a possibility weeks from then could be tried immediately if the advance publicity had safely planted them as real members of the crook fraternity.

If the Irishman was merely camouflaging his knowledge of Daly's army career and suspected his position, that was a chance that had to be taken.

The room was noisy again, although every one seemed to be watching the flyers. Two waiters moved around swiftly; high-pitched laughter from the women and the deeper voices of the men accompanied the clink of glasses and the scraping of chairs. The language was not choice, and oaths were as much in order for the women as the men. At a small table along the wall a short distance from Jasperson's a hulking, loudly dressed man with a mane of black hair was having a verbal battle with a highly rouged young woman in cheap finery.

"Do you want to come outside with us or would you rather ask these gentlemen to move for a few minutes?" queried Daly of Jasperson.

Jasperson gazed around the room reflectively.

"Let me talk to these fellers," he said in a husky voice, and the three got up obediently.

As they scattered to other tables—every one knew everybody else at Mattie's—the Irishman seemed to be enjoying a private joke of his own. Daly was as taut as a bowstring, his mind busy with possibilities. If there was any suspicion whatever that he and Tex were working for the government, their lives weren't worth the change of a nickel. And yet, if the Irishman did know anything justifying him to suspect them and was *persona grata* with these rulers of the smuggling industry, he would have given voice to his doubts when the newspaper stories appeared, and Daly and Tex would not have secured admittance at all.

"Well, what's on your mind?" inquired Jasperson with a throaty chuckle, but his eyes were as hard and bright as diamonds. "Have a drink?"

"Never use it," stated Daly. "Mr. Jasperson, we're here to talk business. Ever hear of either one of us?"

"I read the papers," commented Jasperson. "You boys are in a —— of a fix to pull anything with the whole wide world on your trail."

Daly grunted contemptuously.

"What does that mean?" he asked scornfully. "They've got to catch us, haven't they? And they were trying to do that in Texas for several years."

He was talking in low tones now, inaudible five feet away. Through the din occasional ugly words from the fighting couple reached their ears. Tex, silent as the grave, once turned deliberately and looked over at the table where the two combatants were sitting. The whole scene was the acme of sordid ugliness, and the big Texan was not accustomed to the surroundings.

Daly leaned across the table while Tex lolled back in seeming nonchalance.

"Jasperson, I'll come clean," Daly said tersely. "You can beat around the bush all you want, but we know the lay here. We know it all. That's the reason we're here to stay. You can deny or refuse to admit anything if you want to, but it's a waste of time. We know that you, in person, acting for a group of powerful men with money, handle about half or maybe more of all the stuff that comes across the river. We realize you know your job, have protection and all that.

"We're up here with ten of the toughest boys that ever carried a gun around the Rio Grande or laughed at the Texas Rangers. And we've got the lay of the land, we know what we're going to do and how to do it and we aim to tear this river wide open in less than three months. Then beat it or change our line.

"We're going to do it without interference. Any hijacker that messes around or any doublecrossing is going to be unhealthy.

"The question is this. Are you and I going to work together or is it going to be a fight? You and your gang aim to rule this river. I know that. Well, we're not going to play second fiddle. We're going to get what we want to across. You can tip off your cops, sic your men on us and all that. If you want war of that kind, you can have it. If you want to work with us, that's better."

"What do you mean?" wheezed Jasperson.

He sat in his chair as motionless as a statue, his fat face mirroring no emotion whatever. His eyes did not even flicker, but they were like two brilliant spots of light boring into Daly.

"Just this. We can distribute what we bring over, but we don't want to mess around with it if we can help it. You've got the organization. We want to land the stuff, turn it over to you at the regular wholesale price for cash and forget it."

"How many cases a day?"

"Cases ——!" barked Daly, playing his hard-boiled part. "We're not bothering with liquor. Dope. And the first load will be half a million dollars wholesale."

Jasperson did not bat an eye. There was an instant of dead silence. Then Daly, his eyes resting steadily on his antagonist's, said sharply:

"Can you handle the amount for cash? We're set. The stuff is on the way from Montreal now. We've got the best boat on the river. We've got our landing place ready. Remember this, though. If we have to distribute, we're going to go into it on a big scale. We'll fight you from A to Z, and we aim to see to it that others have to go through us to dispose of their stuff. We can get protection, and after we've got it

we'll try our ——est to get you out of the way. See? We'd rather not. We'd rather work through you, because you're all ready now to do business. Do you want to handle our stuff, and can you handle it in that amount? We—"

An oath, half shouted, cut through the din and Daly stopped talking. Back at the small table the man was standing, half leaning across it as his fist poked itself under the girl's nose. A stream of profanity came from his lips and, as she started to get to her feet, he slapped her down.

As if each muscle in his body was a spring that had suddenly been released, MacDowell seemed to shoot from his chair. His fist, carrying all the power in his superb shoulders, crashed into the rum runner's face, and the man went down, carrying a table with him.

Daly was on his feet as there came the crash of overturning chairs and the shouts and screams of the onlookers. He realized how repulsive the whole scene had been to the Texan, but it was madness for a stranger to start a fight in this dive where a life wasn't worth a nickel. Not a week went by without the finding of a body in the river, and it was jeopardizing the success of the work they were there to do.

The outlaw staggered to his feet as the waiters rushed forward, and again Tex sent him down. There was something tigerish in the Texan as he bounded over to await the next onslaught, his eyes gleaming brightly and his big body taut.

He hurled himself on his antagonist as the man started to draw a gun, and the next second had hurled it against the wall. Daly saw three or four men closing in with the waiters, and the next second his gun was out.

"Stand back!" he yelled, and his gun swung menacingly from side to side. "Don't make a move!"

FOR what seemed like an eternity it was touch and go. The crowd, all in sympathy with the man Tex was beating, seemed to waver. Daly glared around the room, his back to the wall, and waited without a word. He was half crouched, prepared to shoot in an instant. That was the signal to call the federal men in, but it would take time for them to get there, and that meant the failure of the first trap for the air bandits, whether Daly and Tex were saved or not.

Finally he knew he had won. They fell back, as vicious looking a group of thugs as ever were gathered together. And for two minutes Tex methodically beat his opponent into a pulp. The girl was weeping frantically at the table, begging some one to stop him. Running true to the form of her type, she started to her feet to drag Tex from her sweetheart, and Daly had to force her back.

The crowd watched like a pack of wolves. The outlaw's face was a mass of blood, his clothes in tatters, wobbling on his feet. Tex, ruthless as only a man of his temperament can be when literally consumed with savage wrath, measured his beaten foe. He started his right from the floor and connected flush with the jaw. The smuggler's unconscious body left the floor, and fell limply across the table at which he had been sitting.

Without having spoken a word since entering the place, Tex walked calmly to the table and sat down. That wild glow was still in his eyes, but his body was relaxed.

Daly put away his gun and sat down. He called one of the waiters who were clearing away the débris and setting up the tables. The girl was crying over the man, and the rest of the patrons were talking in low tones as their eyes, some with hatred in them and others with admiration, remained fixed on the corner table. Jasperson's face was wreathed in a wide smile.

"What's the damage?" demanded Daly of the waiter while he kept watch of the crowd. No telling how many friends the unconscious man had there.

The waiter consulted with the fat woman, who had come rushing in, and twenty dollars fixed it. Daly turned to Jasperson.

"Interested?" he demanded. "And if so, when can we talk business by ourselves?"

"I've got an office in the Ferris building," grunted Jasperson. "See me at ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

Daly nodded.

"Let's go, Tex," he suggested, his eyes constantly darting around the room. "If we stay, there'll be more trouble when that bird wakes up. And maybe before. Let 'em all cool off."

Tex nodded silently, and they both started for the door, watched by every person in the place. Daly, knowing the ratlike quality of the crowd, was prepared for

anything. Perhaps they were thoroughly awed, but a shot in the back was not an impossibility. He went out the door backward, and to the waiter and the old woman he said crisply:

"If this door opens before we get across this bridge and out of here, it won't be healthy for whoever does it. Understand?"

Apparently she did, for the door did not open, and a minute later they were out in the open air. All was quiet and dark, and somehow Daly, as the almost unbearable tension eased, felt as if what had happened was a nightmare, having no relation to reality.

"Jake Epstein sure paid me back plenty for that ten dollar loan!" he told the silent Texan. "I'll ease over and have Nick-ear shadowed from now on. Looks as if all that stuff we were supposed to pull around here won't be necessary. And gosh, I'm glad of it!"

It took but a moment to find Kelly, one of the federal men, and tell him the *status quo*. Jasperson and the Irishman would both be shadowed from the moment they appeared.

As the two flyers started back toward Detland, Daly was mulling over the events of the night. Somehow, now that he was actually engaged in the struggle, success loomed bigger and bigger in his eyes. It was far more than a mere adventure to him, more than a mere impersonal battle against unknown criminals. Capturing them meant something real to himself, personally—as if he was fighting for his own life and welfare. He was vaguely aware of a feeling that they must succeed, that he could never be utterly happy unless they did. It would be like a payment in full to society for what he had been, and the means of regaining his own self respect.

Nothing in the world was so important to him, and so, as he thought over the happenings of the last hour, he said to MacDowell:

"Gosh, you pulled a bone in there, Tex. It was about an even thing whether we got out alive or not. That bunch is bad enough, at best. Killings average four a week in the Three Towns, and when they're drinking and on their own ground doing what we did, as strangers, is just slapping Fate in the face!"

MacDowell had been very silent, as if something was bothering him. Perhaps the fetid atmosphere, filthy language and general sliminess of the place and its denizens had thoroughly nauseated him.

"Yes?" he drawled sardonically. "Well, where I come from a man doesn't sit around and let the scum of the earth get away with what that —— was pulling with any woman!"

Daly's immobile face flushed in the darkness. Ordinarily immune to the opinion of the world or any individual in it, he was the most sensitive of men where his one real friend was concerned. MacDowell's words had inferred a contempt for Daly's point of view.

"I didn't like it any better than you did," he said quietly. "At the same time, though, we were there for a purpose, and we were walking on eggs. We didn't have a Chinaman's chance of getting out of any real mess whatever. I still don't understand how we did get out, unless the bird you beat up is one of the small fry or very unpopular.

"I may be wrong, but it seems to me that if we mix in and try to make Chesterfields out of every —— sneaking thug we see pulling raw stuff we're shooting at a sparrow and letting the lion go. And those scraps between bums don't amount to anything anyway. That sort of woman eats it up. Why, I had to keep the girl from jumping on you and trying to scratch your eyes out!

"And remember this, Tex, those birds are worse to run up against than the toughest gunman the border ever saw. These dirty swine aren't real men. They're dope-fiends and drunkards and degenerates who'd do anything they could get away with, and it's a knife in the back and odds all in their favor!"

Tex lit a cigaret. To the abnormally sensitive Daly the big airman didn't seem like himself. He'd been shaken to the heels, somehow.

"Well," he drawled, "of course I'm not used to the customs and ideas of a bunch like that as you are, and doubtless my manners aren't good form in that set, thank God!"

Something within Daly seemed to freeze. MacDowell was placing him alongside the men he had just seen, attributing to him the same viewpoint as they had. He was implying that Daly was spiritually akin to them without the instincts which animated MacDowell and other men who had not been smeared with the underworld slime.

"Meaning," Daly asked slowly, "that mine are?"

"Meaning nothing at all," stated Tex crisply.

Abruptly Daly drew within himself. When the smallest of chance remarks did penetrate beneath his shell, it became like a mortal wound. Because of what Tex meant, had meant in his life, the slightest indication that the Southerner was still not certain that wnat Daly had been had nothing to do with what he was, meant that there was no friendship. Not on a basis of equality at any rate. At the first crisis Tex was assuming that Daly had been rotted by his environment, was not as other, normal men.

Coming from another, it would have rebounded harmlessly from Daly's shell of cynical individualism. Coming from Tex, it meant utter failure. Once again his efforts to attain some portion of what he craved were frustrated, and he was alone again.

His nature had been moulded so that it was utterly impossible for him to state his feelings frankly, to even indicate further that he had been mortally hurt. It was rather to shrink inside his protective covering once more—disillusioned, disappointed but uncomplaining. He had been forced into a false position, but it was all part of the years that had gone before, and another penalty that must be paid.

When he spoke his voice was cool and even.

"You know the lay as well as I do," he summed up equably, his pain-filled eyes straight ahead. "It looks as if we'd been planted so securely that Jasperson will bite. Evidently I haven't been connected with the events in Louisville or that army stuff. Whether his bite will land the fish we want remains to be seen."

There was little further conversation, and that was strained and meaningless. Daly's heart was like ice within him, and Tex seemed to feel its chill.

VII

IT WAS shortly after midnight, three days after their call on Mr. Corny Jasperson, and the two flyers were smoking cigarets as they kept watch beside their S.E.5s. The shed wherein the tiny scouts had been hidden loomed darkly in the shadow ahead of them, and the two master mechanics were lounging easily alongside it. The small field was two miles from Eastland, and at that hour was as secluded a hiding place as could be found within miles of Detland or the Three Towns.

The airmen were silent. Somehow it seemed that they had been silent most of the time when together for the past three days. As always Daly was ever conscious of the weight which seemed to be on his heart. There had been not a minute of the days when he had been able to forget the shadow which had suddenly swooped down and engulfed him.

The tense expectation of what was ahead was in the forefront of his mind, but the real thrill was not in it any more. He was trying at the moment to concentrate his thoughts on the past few days and make certain that no detail had been overlooked. Despite himself, though, his brain would go off on a sidetrack and live over personal things instead of official actions.

In dozens of places along the river, ensconced in heaps of débris on the banks, hidden in disused sheds, federal men were watching in the darkness. Up at Selden Field, thirty miles away, the pursuit group flyers were ready at a radio signal to send their fast single-seaters roaring on their way if help was needed. Over on the Canadian shore right then a dozen federal men were probably embarking for the dash across the river, and their speed boat was supposed to and really did hold a half million dollars worth of narcotics.

The Duke tried to literally force his numb mind into keen alertness. It seemed to him that he hadn't had an hour's restful sleep or a moment's waking peace for three days.

Going over and over their plans, it did appear that everything humanly possible had been done to insure the successful culmination of the chase. The interview in Corny Jasperson's office had been satisfactory, eminently so. All arrangements had been made for the turning over of the smuggled cargo to Jasperson's representatives for cash. Apparently there was not a breath of suspicion on the part of any one.

However, it was still a gamble. If Jasperson, either directly or through the man with the scarred ear, or another was the lookout man for the air bandits, it was almost a certainty that they would swoop down for their biggest haul. If Jasperson

was not a double-crosser and had nothing to do with the flying thugs, there was still a chance that the news of the shipment might leak out to their ally, whoever he was. In any case, the government was baiting its hook with exceedingly luscious bait. The shadowing of Jasperson and the Irishman, however, had not yielded a clue.

Every federal lookout was equipped with rockets. If the great, silent flying machine landed anywhere, the news would flare against the sky as soon as its crew had disembarked, and it was certain that it could not take off before Daly and Tex arrived on the scene. At the point on the American shore where the drugs were to be landed and delivered, a swarm of men were waiting, hidden, to do battle with either bandits or Jasperson men or both. Probably, though, if the bandits swooped down they would try to capture the boat in the river. For that eventuality, the boat was armed with extremely efficient machine guns.

The S.E.5s were in perfect shape from radio sets to machine guns. Special gas and oil tanks made them able to stay more than four hours in the air, and their smooth-running hundred and eighty horse-power motors were tuned to the minute. All was in readiness for the battle in the night, and yet Daly, smoking a continuous series of cigarets in perfect silence, did not care. He was going through the motions, with no real spark of excitement or satisfaction.

Often he thought that perhaps he was making a total ass of himself. And yet, all that was necessary was for him to think back to MacDowell's remark and the inflection of his voice and straightway the old feeling came back in full force. The recollection of it was another stab, and his shell of hard individualism closed over the wound to hide it.

And so, brooding over it continuously, it was assuming greater and greater proportions, until he had made of a sentence a whole outburst of contemptuous, sneering words. MacDowell had been the focal point of all the loyalty and frustrated desire of friendship and understanding in Daly's starved nature. No more than the lift of an eyebrow from the big Texan had been necessary to blot out the light and warmth of Daly's world.

He had not shown it too plainly. That icy repression with which he met the rest of life had become a part of him with MacDowell now. When he talked it was impersonally, evenly, with quiet control and utter lack of visible emotion. He didn't blame Tex at that. Why should the border patrolmen have any particular confidence in, to say nothing of liking for, a strange young ex-crook? But it was hard to be utterly alone once more.

Whether MacDowell even noticed the change he did not know. The Southerner said nothing about it. They went along evenly, but something warm and understanding and satisfying had departed, and with every hour the strain of it became more maddening and nerve wracking to Daly.

Well, he was thinking, the —— job would be over soon and he could get away by himself. He'd be all right as soon as Tex had gone and he had placed the army man alongside the other shadowy figures of the past, the ones he had been forced to put aside to go his way alone.

His slim body tightened as if an electric current had flashed through it. The rocket burned against the sky in a flaming curve.

"Landed, by ——!" he said slowly as the mechanics leaped for the ships. "And at least two miles from Slater's. That's funny. They're on the river though."

The first S.E. burst into roaring life as Tex used a big pair of night glasses. There'd be nothing special to see, doubtless, because that rocket meant the bandit ship had actually landed.

"She's still in the air, going up, but low!" yelled MacDowell above the purr of the idling motors. "That fellow shot his rocket too soon! She's about three hundred feet high and not trying to land! Scared off!"

There was something vibrant in the Texan's voice, and what mounted to a chuckle testified to the joy with which he met the coming of the climax. For the moment Daly, too, forgot himself as his heart bounded to the thrill of the moment. By common consent they leaped into the two S.E.s and, side by side, raced over the field as one of the mechanics turned on the searchlight which had never been lit before.

There was but one possible procedure. That was to follow the bandit ship and, if possible, track it to its lair. If it seemed necessary, it could be shot down, but then, with its passengers dead and its hidden base unknown, the night's work would be far from a complete success.

Some federal man had made a bad error. Perhaps as the ship was landing and he had readied his rocket it had gone off accidentally. Or he had been too anxious. Anyhow, the ship had been scared off by the sight of the signal. That was typical of the bandits. A keen bunch they were.

His steady hand on the stick, Daly, for the moment, gave himself over to the joy of feeling a ship under him once more. Throttle wide open, the S.E. was like a live thing as its over-powered motor dragged the small craft across the ground like a darting dragon-fly. It lifted buoyantly under him just as Tex got his ship off. Together they banked around, climbing all the time, and an instant later were speeding toward the river.

Their prey was absolutely invisible in the darkness. There was no exhaust flame at all. They were using the electric for a while. But that couldn't last long. It was a moonlit night, and sooner or later they'd pick it up. That ship couldn't climb fast until it used its full power—every passing moment meant that the S.E.s were gaining.

In a little more than a minute after the take-off they were circling above the river, a thousand feet high. Down below, despite the hour, people were tumbling out of houses like gophers from their burrows, looking upward in bewildered wonder.

TEX led the way, and Daly could see him using the night-glasses. Steadily they both climbed. All the altitude they could get would probably be none too much.

Tex was leading northward toward the lake.

Then Daly picked up the fleeing ship. They had turned on the gasolene motors. Evidently they had seen their pursuers and decided that the noise of their own motors wouldn't mean anything then. The four exhaust flames were banners of fire against the darkness, and with their aid the Duke could pick out the huge, sinister craft which was thundering away through the darkness for its unknown haven.

It was higher than the S.E.s, but they would gain on it. And it was a mile or more ahead. Daly wondered what Tex would radio. It had been decided that he handle the key when possible, because he was in better practise. He'd keep Selden Field informed of their course from Detland and the elapsed time so that the Selden ships could follow if necessary.

The twin-motored bandit craft was leading the way out over the lake. Soon there was nothing but moon-silvered water below them. Daly nodded, meanwhile jeering at himself for having a head of hitherto unmatched thickness. Why hadn't some one thought of that. Their base might be on an island or in Canada, but in either event flying over the Great Lakes meant reducing the chance of detection to almost nothing until they hit land.

A forced landing would be far from pleasant. Two hours, perhaps, before the ship sank, and then a quiet, peaceful drowning in the middle of the far stretching inland sea.

Fifteen minutes, twenty, half an hour, and still the ship ahead boomed on. Daly had his S.E. throttled to thirteen hundred now—to keep well back of the fugitive. There was just a chance the S.E.s hadn't been seen by those aboard the air liner.

Tex was only a hundred feet away as, side by side, the two scouts raced on above the moonlit scene below. The water was like a sheet of silver, and in the sky fleecy white clouds were sometimes so low they brushed the wings of the ships. Twenty-five hundred feet now, and that rush through the cool, smooth night air was like some fairy journey, too unreal to be believable, too breathlessly beautiful to belong to the world.

Daly's eyes roved the water ceaselessly, watching for a possible island or some sign of land. More and more it seemed to him that the bandits had their base on some island. That would be ideal in every way.

And so it turned out. Soon the ship ahead began a gradual dive, and as it did the S.E.s, motor wide open again, began to climb. Spot the rendezvous, radio back to Selden the course and the length of time it had taken to fly it at the rate they had been going by their airspeed meters, then circle and wait, holding the fort with their machine guns until help arrived. Tex would have all the data to radio back—course a few degrees west of north, time thirty-two minutes at ninety-five miles an hour, They'd turn on their landing lights, too, and as long as their ships stayed in the air they'd be aërial lighthouses visible for miles.

There was an island ahead. As Daly, his head over the side, watched unwinkingly, he saw a powerful light flash swiftly and

disappear. The other ship was invisible now. No exhaust flames. It was gliding, motors off.

For what seemed like an eternity Daly waited, as the scouts circled ever higher above that dark splotch of earth. The island was not more than a quarter of a mile in length and scarcely half that wide. A dot in the water, it seemed to have a heavy growth of trees, and there was not a house or building which was visible in the moonlight.

Then so suddenly that it was like a physical shock a great searchlight sent a flood of light along the ground. Evidently it had been shaded so that not a beam of light shot upward, for it illumined a field with the light of day and left the air above it dark.

He watched the big ship land, and instantly the searchlight was snuffed out. Tex would be radioing all details now. About an hour's watch, patroling around the island to see that nobody on it got away, and all would be over. Then what? Not back to Louisville certainly. Just wandering around, probably, seeking something which it seemed he could never find. Hoped he wouldn't, for that matter. Sometimes he thought he had reached his heart's desire, temporarily, only to find that the reaction when he was disappointed had been pain far more keen than total lack of hope would have been. Like this, for instance. A few days of leaping anticipation and quiet happiness, then just the dregs of what might have been.

As quickly as the snuffing of a light results in darkness, his brooding was forgotten as he leaned forward tensely. On the ground, close to thick trees which evidently hid a hangar of some sort, a small dark shape had appeared beside the larger bulk of the big ship. In a moment there were flashes of light. Looked like the exhausts of a ship, a much smaller ship.

A second later there were more. He sent his ship over toward Tex and pointed down. There could be no mistake now. Four ships, at least, were warming up.

As his mind raced over possibilities, he automatically signaled the Texan. Both flyers started downward. They must pick off those fighters. Daly throttled his motor half-way, and then stalled his ship, nose high in the air. Stick back in his lap, he gave it full right rudder, and the ship fell off into a whirling tailspin that sent it screwing downward. A few turns; and he brought it level, jazzed the throttle, cut it again, and cocked the scout up in a terrific sideslip that fairly ate up the altitude. Spiraling, spinning, slipping, diving, getting down as fast as he could without cooling his motor too fast or overstraining his plane, he tried his hardest to get down.

Probably the whole band were flyers. Those other ships, being so small, might be completely equipped fighting planes. With three or four of them that island retreat was impregnable against anything but other airplanes. The whole police force of Detland might descend on that island and be helpless on their boats as they were raked with machine-gun fire. Protected by fighters, the big ship with one pilot and the loot could make off and disappear—possibly in some remote Canadian fastness which was already prepared. With such elaborate preparations for twentieth century banditry as those men had made anything was possible.

Fifteen hundred feet high now, and the four small ships were in the air. The motors of the big ship were running, and three men were hustling around it. The searchlight was on now, too. All thought of safety or secrecy had been abandoned to the greater need of haste.

There was nothing to do but fight it out. Daly forgot Tex, forgot his own troubles, was unaware of anything now but that there was a job before him. He and MacDowell alone, fifty miles from the mainland, must hold that island. In that moment Daly changed from the brooding, bitterly disappointed individual he had been to a machine. The old feeling swept over him as the moment approached when he could actually do something which would make him forget himself and the past and immerse himself in a fight on the right side. He was unconscious of fear, and even his excitement was cold, and it controlled anticipation. Here was another blow he could strike, another savage grapple which would gain him another rung up the ladder to complete vindication and self-respect.

Four to two, but he and Tex had the altitude. MacDowell was a bit higher than Daly and had leveled out momentarily. Probably radioing this last development.

Daly came level now, too. The four ships had scattered widely, and were climbing

desperately. Below the big ship was slowly turning around for the take-off.

The Kentuckian took the nearest scout, four hundred feet lower than his own S.E. and two hundred yards to one side. Motor full on and diving steeply, the single-seater quivered like an animal trembling with eagerness, and just as the shrill of the wires became a high-pitched, savage scream which almost drowned the roar of the racing motor he got his bead and pressed the gun control on the stick. For a second he continued to dive on his antagonist, a stream of lead gushing through his propellor. And then the other ship faltered, and fell off into a spin.

HE USED his excess speed in a mighty *zoom* that carried him three hundred feet higher. As he turned, his narrowed eyes sweeping the darkened sky, his gaze froze on MacDowell's ship. It was swooping down on the nearest bandit plane. The other two were some distance away, climbing steeply while they had the opportunity.

For a few seconds the enemy ship dodged and then, as if in desperation, shot upward toward its pursuer. For a second it seemed to be standing on its tail, like a bear rearing to fight, and simultaneously the guns of the S. E. and the unknown ship spat fire.

The lower plane stalled and the nose dropped. The next second it was in a terrific dive. At that second Daly's victim crashed and a great ball of fire seemed to leap full-born from the earth. The sky was a pool of red, and in the crimson illumination of that gigantic funeral pyre Daly caught a glimpse of the unknown pilot whom MacDowell had just fought. He was hanging limply over the side of his spinning ship. A gone gosling if there ever was one, he thought.

Then Daly's composed face tightened and lines sprang into being from nostrils to compressed lips. For the other S. E. was spinning toward the earth lazily, half straightening and then dropping more steeply. Out of control. That second when the other ship had stood on its tail and fought back had resulted in a lucky or wonderfully skillful hit. The unknown pilot had got MacDowell.

For a few seconds that were like eternity itself Daly's ashen mask of a face was thrust over the side of the ship, while eyes that were brooding pools of bitter, half-bewildered tragedy, watched the falling ship. He did not notice that the Texan's opponent had crashed without catching fire.

MacDowell was going down, doomed. Instinctively Daly knew that Tex was unconscious. Every maneuver of the ship bespoke a pilotless craft. He forgot the other ships speeding toward him, forgot that he had considered the army airman as completely out of his life. All he could remember was that the one friend of his lonely lifetime was within a split second of the last landing.

The fluttering ship was almost on the ground when it seemed to straighten. It hovered groggily for a moment and then one wing dropped and it slid downward. An instant later it had crashed on the right wing.

The big ship was circling widely now, gaining altitude as it pointed north. With a snap Daly came to himself, but all the inward fire which had momentarily warmed him during that struggle was gone and the fierce joy of the fight had turned into ashen indifference. What did it matter now? But he'd fight on. He must get that big ship which would have all the loot and several of the thugs aboard.

He banked around just in time. One ship was speeding toward him from slightly above. The other one was still going higher. His back was against the wall now, both ships higher than he.

As he went into a steep dive, preparing for his next maneuver against that oncoming plane, he flashed a look downward. Plain in the glow of the flames which were licking one of the wrecked ships he saw a figure dragging itself from the débris which had been the southerner's scout. Tex was alive.

A warm flood of happiness seemed to gush through Daly's veins. In a trice he had lifted his ship in a zoom, and for just a second he got his bead on the other ship. A hail of lead, but still the other craft held its fire and came on.

A hundred yards to one side of it and still higher its companion suddenly went into a terrific dive, straight for the ground. He thought Daly a hopeless victim of his comrade, perhaps, and was going down to finish off Tex and close his mouth forever. Doubtless they didn't want their direction of flight known. Or, perhaps, he was diving to get into a position to finish off Daly himself from another angle.

Somehow, though, the Duke was certain that the second ship was bound down to send a burst of bullets into the helpless Texan who was now lying quietly on the ground. A slight bank, and Daly's ship was headed to intersect the course of the diving scout. Well before it was necessary he started to shoot. That dropping ship passed through an area of concentrated fire, and its dive never stopped until it hit the ground.

The windshield before Daly's eyes shattered, and suddenly his prop was vibrating tremendously. Desperately he dodged and shot upward as the last ship, now slightly above him, sent its bullets in a steady flow. As Daly threw his vibrating ship into a vertical bank to dodge underneath his pursuer, a red hot spear seemed to pierce him, and his body was thrown heavily forward. His head hit the instrument board, and he had to fight for consciousness.

He was wounded. How badly he did not know. It was just below the right shoulder, and his clothing was being soaked in blood.

Looming largely before his dancing vision, but far away it seemed, the big ship bulked black against the moon. In his state of dizzy half consciousness the whole thing was a nightmare that couldn't be true. Nevertheless, his whirling brain caught and held tenaciously to one idea. He must get that big ship. There was the real prey. He forgot the other scout, forgot everything. He wasn't even aware of why he must get that twin-motored craft out there over the water, waiting for its smaller sisters. But he must.

Wide open, he made for it. He didn't look back. He didn't know that his S.E. was full of holes, his windshield shot away, the seat of his cockpit soaked in blood.

He leaned down to sight his guns better. Everything was leaping and dancing before his eyes. He couldn't hit the lake if he had to. That was a pretty scene—the moon and everything.

He felt himself slipping into unconsciousness. With a mighty effort he straightened, and as if he'd tapped a reservoir of strength, everything became preternaturally clear. He glanced around calmly. It was as if his body didn't exist. He was nothing but a brain.

The other scout was following him, but dropping back. Maybe his prop was in worse shape than Daly's, or a bullet had crippled its motor. It was in the air, but flopping along like a wounded duck.

Then a wave of weakness passed over the Duke. He knew that he was slipping. He aimed his ship instinctively and fired until his ammunition drum was empty. It looked as if the big ship was diving. He didn't know.

He must land. He was only five hundred feet high. He banked, the ship slipping and skidding wildly. Then a shattering roar, splinters all around him. His prop had flown off into pieces. He cut the throttle, reeling in his seat. He nosed down. The water came up to meet him. It looked nice and cool and smooth. It wouldn't hurt him.

He practically lost consciousness as he stalled above it. In a second that was like dreaming just before sleep he felt the cold shock of the lake. Cold water or no cold water, though, he must sleep.

VIII

HE CAME to underneath the trees, lying on a heap of clothes. He was very weak. He saw many uniformed figures a short distance away. He was about to hail them—they must be from Selden Field—when a round, mustached face appeared before him as if by magic. The searchlight was on, and it was as bright as if dawn had come.

"Woke up, eh?" remarked the stout officer cheerily. "I'm the flight surgeon from Selden. Came along in a D.H. because I figured I might be needed."

"Tell me what happened," Daly said weakly. "How's Tex? MacDowell, I mean?"

"O.K., except for a broken ankle and a few bruises. How he ever got out to you I don't know."

"Out to me?" breathed Daly as if stupefied.

"Sure. He swam out to your ship with that ankle, and we found you in the cockpit and him unconscious hanging on to the ship, which was just about ready to sink. He wanted to haul you to shore, but couldn't make it. Had a flesh wound that bled a lot. The big ship, with a crippled engine and the oiltank punctured with a bullet was floating on the water. Got an awful lot of stuff out of it, but no dope."

Daly scarcely listened to what he was saying. Tex had dragged himself to the water

and swam out to him. Why, everything was all right. Of course. The nightmare was all over. Tex wouldn't have done that unless he was a friend—liked him—

He tried to stay awake because he was feeling so good, but he couldn't. In the fitful periods of wakefulness on the government boat which took them back, however, he was utterly happy and scarcely knew why. Even his delirium was pleasant.

For a week, off and on, in a Detland hospital he thought about it. He was too weak to have visitors, and didn't want any. He just laid there in a torpor, vaguely aware that when he got better everything was going to be all right.

His first visitor was Tex, hobbling in on crutches. His face was not so brown, quite, but the old smile was tugging on his lips, pulling one corner down and the other one up.

"You've been sort of amongst the missing," he drawled. "Your name is Daly and you're in Detland if you want to know."

"Thanks," grinned Daly. "Say, stick a cigaret in my face, will you, before that —— horse-faced nurse gets back? Then tell me the news."

"Nothing much," MacDowell remarked, watching the door warily as he gave Daly puffs at the cheroot. "They were smart crooks, five of 'em recruited from the scum of the allied armies. Maranao, the leader, was from the Italian Air Service. Their only interest in dope was as thieves. Jasperson was a fine double-crosser. He tipped 'em off on the big shipment, as he did on their first dope excursion. They stole it from the people he'd have bought it from, and then he got it at half price from them. He's in jail, and it looks as if, with all the information dug up in this federal drive, the dope situation around here will be cleaned pretty thoroughly. Nick-ear—by the way, name's O'Malley— was general scout for the bunch. He's an old thug, killer in labor wars and all that.

"The airplane bunch figured to get away from their island under cover of the scouts, and they've got a hide-away about five hundred miles north in Canada that hasn't been found yet. Funny part of it is that they had so much loot that they were going out of business, honest, when we came along and tempted 'em into a last safe big job. The only ones left alive were three in the big plane with all the stuff except the cash money. Between dope and cash robberies they had so much they didn't figure on taking a chance selling furs and jewelry for a long time."

A momentary silence fell, followed by more desultory conversation and then a still longer silence. Daly puffed with enjoyment, a peaceful look in his eyes and the ghost of a smile on his boyish, unlined face. Then Tex spoke, more slowly even than was his wont.

"Duke, now that everybody's feeling good and all that, there's something I want to say, especially because from what Graves says there's quite a chance that we may be together a lot. Back in that joint where we saw Jasperson we had a little disagreement, whereupon you started acting like a prima donna or something. I knew it from the start, and I wouldn't say a thing I might have because I thought you were doing a close imitation of a temperamental idiot and a —— fool. I thought you were a hard-boiled egg, and I found a hysterical, sensitive half-wit on my hands. Why be like that?"

Daly nodded slightly.

"You're right," he said evenly. "I went off at half-cock. Maybe, though, I wasn't as easy in my mind as I am now."

He didn't say more. What he was thinking was that from this day on the last poisonous recollection in his mind had been made innocuous. He felt mentally cleansed. That extreme sensitiveness had been borne of that he had been, all that Tex meant to him and the result of years of loneliness. Somehow now, he felt as if he had become a new man—his debts paid, his worries gone, his position secure, his future, whatever of physical hardship it might hold, a pleasant and sunny thing. Tex had himself given the lie to what Daly had thought.

He glanced up to meet the Texan's warmly glowing gray eyes.

"Now that we're on the subject," Daly said equably, "I still maintain that in your rush of Texas heat to the head back in Mattie's place you, likewise, were several varieties of a cuckoo yourself."

"I was," grinned MacDowell, and with a queer tug at his heart Daly realized that the big Southerner, too, was feeling more at ease.

"Which," added Tex as the nurse came in to shoo him out, "puts us both in the class where we belong!"

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THERE is something—a broader development of the idea expressed in the Adventurers' Clubs of Chicago, New York and other cities. An international order of adventurers is suggested by Aleko E. Lilius of "Ask Adventure" and I'm glad to bring his plan to Camp-Fire's attention. Our magazine has no voice in any of the proposed order's affairs and undertakes no part in connection with it except to help start things by serving as clearing-house, but it certainly has our good wishes.

New York City.

It was during the last revolution, that "Tex" (Edward) O'Reilly and I met accidentally in Mexico City. The spirit of adventure was the magnet which had drawn us both over the border, he doing some research work, I shooting pictures for newsreels and syndicates. As common in Mexico, he departed very unexpectedly. My assistant and I were jailed and 33d (deported).

WHILE sitting in a café and conversing about the things in which we were both interested—the possibility of Adventure—with a capital "A," where we might possibly meet again, etc., occurred to us that there was something we adventurers missed and longed for. We roam from country to country; see and do strange things, always on the alert for the unusual to happen and many of us believing that we are entirely satisfied with this life—but we are not.

The most common occurrence in adventuring is that we make friends, many of whom we would like to see and talk with again, but we do not—we lose sight of them and may never hear from or see them again because we belong to a brotherhood that exists without any real organization. Why can we not organize an order such as the Knights of

Columbus, Shriners, Free Masons? Not just a club with a few selected members but a big brotherhood of adventurers that should consist of red-blooded, upright, honest men. Country, birth, religion, belief making no difference.

Let every reader of this magazine write to us, addressing the envelope to the I.B.A. (International Brotherhood of Adventurers), care of *Adventure*, telling us his ideas and opinion. Then at a later date, we would all meet through a large convention.

Let us start this ball rolling, get together and really organize this Brotherhood.—ALEKO E. LILIUS.

"WHERE are you Noel H. Stearn?" Also, "a fellow named Dawson" might help a little. Last July we received the following letter and its enclosure:

Republic, Mich.

I met a fellow named Dawson and got friendly with him and showed him some rhymes I made on rainy days and he told me to type this one and send it to you. I haven't any typewriter, so I printed it.

I've been prospecting up in the Pesheeke country but I didn't have any luck, so I came down here to pick up a grub-stake for next year when I'm going into the country between the Yukon and the Cassiar. Nobody's been there yet that I know of. Right now I'm looking land for a land company, which isn't so tame as I thought it was going to be, thank the god of Paul Bunyon, and it pays enough to put aside a stake.

Dawson said you might pay for this but anyway you'd be interested in it. I hope so.—NOEL STEARN.

P.S. He put the title on it. It didn't have any title before.

The title Dawson gave the poem was "The File Clerk." Under our new poetry policy of no longer using poems as "fillers," as is the general custom of magazines, but buying only those that really got to a man and stirred him we find ourselves, as we expected, buying very, very few of them. Something like seven all told in the past half year. But "The File Clerk" happens to be one of the seven.

So we notified Mr. Stearn to that effect and a check for one hundred and twenty dollars was duly dispatched to him at Republic, Michigan.

So far, so good. But our letters and check came back to us unclaimed.

And there we are and where is Mr. Stearn?

We put an inquiry in "Lost Trails" in the December 10th issue and here is our second inquiry. We're holding the check until we get a letter over Mr. Stearn's signature telling us where to send it and we're going ahead and printing the poem in an early issue. And now will Mr. Stearn help us out by taking the hundred and twenty dollars off of us and, if he sees fit, adding it to his grub-stake?

And see here, Comrade Stearn, you've made us quite a bit of trouble first and last and made us enlist the services of all Camp-Fire in trying to locate you. You owe Camp-Fire, especially us in the office, something and, if you're the good sport I suspect you of being, you'll pay up and I'll tell you how I think you ought to do it.

All of us at Camp-Fire have naturally become especially interested in that hundred and twenty dollars and sort of feel that we ought to know what happens to it. I think you ought to make a point of adding it to your grub-stake and then reporting to us later on what luck you have with that grub-stake. In return we'll all of us root for you to the limit and it might even happen that somewhere along your way some of us might meet up with you and extend a friendly hand or at least a friendly greeting. Fair enough, I calls it, and are you with us? Which last you can take either way.

The poem? No, it isn't the strong, rugged stuff that shakes men's souls nor is it the kind of thing that makes anemic ladies palpitate, but we think you'll have a good time reading it. Watch for it in a future issue—

AS TO his cover on this issue Colcord Heurlin, who has spent a good deal of time in Alaska, tells us that the elk is the sacred animal of this Indian's tribe and so is not to be killed by any of that tribe. But famine has come and elk must be slain to fend off starvation.

Mr. Heurlin gives here the Indian's prayer to the Great Spirit for forgiveness:

HIS TOTEM

Oh! Great Spirit! I lament!
Here I offer you this deed,
Please forgive! Make us content!
Hungry Indians are in need.

Lands are barren, big storms near,
Ruthless white man robs "our grounds",
Bear and moose all gone from here
Back to Happy Hunting Grounds.

See where kindred totem lies!
'Neath my rifle that has slain,
See my severed clan-blood ties!
See my heart that's filled with pain!

COLCORD HEURLIN.

A PARAGRAPH taken out of a letter from Harry Simon of our writers' brigade, giving an unofficial view of the fleet's visit to Australia and New Zealand:

U. S. S. Altair,
San Diego, California.

In connection with our just-completed cruise, we certainly had a good time. Both in Australia and New Zealand. People would stop us on the street and invite us home to "tea." Everybody extended themselves to their utmost to make our brief stay pleasant. And I found none but the kindest feelings toward America. We sure hated to leave. A couple months more would have suited us just right. And don't let anybody tell you we didn't soak up their wet goods. Individually and as a body we were fairly well behaved, but we're no tin angels. We drank as much as the Australians and New Zealanders expected us to. The only words of surprize I heard expressed were on the grounds of horse racing; the gobs didn't flock to them in the numbers they had been expecting. For that matter, there were so many excursions and parties planned for us that it hardly left any time to plant a foot on the bar or get as well acquainted with the Aussie flappers as many of us would have liked, let alone taking in the races. As it is, we made enough friends in Australia to make the matter of a reduced postal rate with that country of interest to us all. Australian and New Zealand mail is on the increase. —HARRY SIMON.

A LETTER on college education from a college graduate, and I'm being raw enough to leave in it some praise for our magazine. Also it is a case in which signing with initials only seem warranted.

For a long time I have sat in the circle of Camp-Fire, month after month for years, and, until today, I have done much intending and no writing. But in the Oct. 20th issue I have before me you began to talk about education and the colleges, and as a college man, I believe I should at least do a little speaking.

YOU are right so far as you go, but you do not put it strongly enough. From my own experience I have learned, after being away from college for more years than I care to think of, and I am still a young man after all, that my chief advantages from four years in college have been as follows, and about in the order named: (1) the association with my classmates and fraternity chums intimately; (2) the learning of clean sportsmanship in athletics; (3) the training in straight thinking resulting from professional studies.

From the first, I learned to meet all types and classes of men, so that, with the pounding the world gave me after I got through my studies, I was able to see the good side in even the poorest and most ignorant, and to make friends with them all. It knocked the foolish idea out of my head that the New England Yankee of the old school was the only person to be considered. My professors could not do that.

From the second, I learned the law of give and take, that a man was a fool when he was jealous of the other man, to take a licking or a defeat without a whimper, and to congratulate the other fellow when he won, and ask for another chance. The best fellow in the world, to me, is the amateur athlete who plays as seriously and as cleanly as he knows how, without boasting. I may have been a dub athlete, but I am proud of the fact that in college I associated with the best men there, the athletes who loved the game, and wished to win for the sake of the whole team. And they are the men who, when they go out in the world, are the best leaders, if not the biggest money-makers.

For the third side, the facts we get in college are worth nothing in themselves. Any one can go to the encyclopedia and get all the facts he wants about anything. But the ordinary man is sure to make mistakes in reasoning, which college training help him to avoid in part at least. He is taught to think in a straight line, and to detect any fallacies. People in this town sometimes actually treat me as though I were an encyclopedia or an atlas, thinking that, because I am a teacher of classical studies and mathematics and forty other things, that I should have my brain simply loaded with facts at a moment's notice about everything that ever happened or might happen. I refuse to be such, so long as I know where I can find the answer. It seems better to be able to solve a problem when I come to it, than to spend all the time in study. Besides, it is a lot more fun to go fishing or clamming, and in the evening when the necessary work is done to read *Adventure*, and dream of the things I wish I could do and probably never will do.

Perhaps my estimate of your magazine, or rather our magazine, as I have a special love for it, will be interesting. I learn more from *Adventure* than from any textbook. Many times people ask me where I learned this and that fact, and my reply seems to be usually, "Why, from the Camp-Fire or from Ask Adventure, or from this or that man who has been in that place." Being a living question-box has its advantages.—A. T. H.

SOMETHING from W. C. Tuttle concerning his complete novelette in this issue—a giving of credit due to a one-time fellow townsman:

Hollywood, California.

The plot of "Vanishing Brands" was suggested to me by F. H. Sinclair, erstwhile cow-puncher, but now a resident of New York. It seems that Sinclair and I were born in the same town in eastern Montana, although I preceded him by a couple of big whoops.

In a letter from him he told me of an incident in which some friends of his conceived a relay system of handling stolen horses, taking them from Montana to Canada. It worked fine until something went wrong—as it usually does. But their idea was fine. I am not going to tell you the culmination of their deal, because I am going to use it in another story, I hope. Anyway, it deals with a type of justice which is almost unknown in this age of queer defenses, *à la* Leopold and Loeb.—TUT.

THOSE of you who wanted a sequel to "A Moment of Greatness" will be pleased to meet *Daly* in Thomson Burtis's complete novelette in this issue. A word from Mr. Burtis concerning the real facts back of the story:

As far as the story has gone into the smuggling-town stuff, I've been absolutely true to life. From the old fiction gag of secret passageways and *caches* to the drunken police chief collecting his bit, I've described exactly and without exaggeration places and things I've seen in the downriver towns along the — River. Every character had its prototype—so closely that I've changed the name of the city. I could write a whole "Camp-Fire" on what I saw over there and what I know goes on.

The ship, *Amphibian*, is a fact, all but the electric motor, and of course the practicability of that for short running—enough to get off the ground silently—is obvious to everyone.—BURTIS.

AND now the archers have fallen to arguing among themselves—a question as to the source of lemonwood used for bows:

Mr Hawley says that lemonwood comes from South Africa. It is possible that it does grow there, but the lemonwood that is on the market under the name of Dagamme comes from Cuba and vicinity.—ROUNSEVELL.

IF ANY one has the idea that the Plato he meets in this issue is only a fanciful sketch, the following should disabuse him:

Let me say that it has necessitated a great deal of work. I have dipped into almost every conceivable thing that has come down to us from ancient times on the subject of Plato. Diodorus Siculus, Diogenes Laertius, Cornelius Nepos, Demosthenes, Olympiodorus, etc., not to speak of Plutarch, Cicero and their ilk. Then I read either in the original or translation most of the works of Plato himself. Then came some dozen writers on Plato—the modern critics, I mean, like Grote. Not to forget a big work on Greek life and manners. So you see I prepared for the tale just as though I were going to write a dissertation.

I BELIEVE that the dramatic quality of the story has not suffered thereby, for I wrote, of course, only after I had assimilated my data. It was not really hard to get into the spirit of the tale, for I had wandered about Athens and have a vivid mental picture of what the old city must have been when the present ruins of the *agora*, the Parthenon, etc., were standing in all their glory. As in the case of Cervantes. I have been to Algiers and have seen what purports to be the cave where the friends of Cervantes hid for six months before the attempted escape. I think the present cave has been constructed for tourist purposes. I saw a lady tourist so thrilled that she paid out good money for a little stone that the guard let her pick out of the wall. Going back the next day, I took pains to see whether another stone had been put back. It had. I have often wondered how many tons of rock are sold each year as part of the true and original wall.

TO RETURN to Plato. Going through the various accounts of Plato's great adventures, I found a great diversity of statements. There were certain well-defined points of agreement, however, that showed that the essential truth was there. I combined the whole and made a narrative that departs in no way from what could have happened, had some one written down the adventure from beginning to end—at the time. Worked into the narrative are Plato's own words culled from the "Republic," the "Crito," the "Apology," etc., as Plato might well have said them in the circumstances. For instance, it is agreed by *all* the writers that Plato had a violent discussion with Dionysius that ended in his misfortunes. I supplied part of the conversation from the "Republic," part from Plutarch's "Lives" (that of Dion), and part from my own mind. Can you tell which is which? I should be interested to know.—POST SARGENT.

TWO letters and two enclosures from a Texan comrade. Haven't yet had the "Button Snake Root" identified scientifically, but hope to do so.

Rockport, Texas.

The "milkweed" mentioned by Gordon Young, Page 183, October 30th issue, is the wild poinsetta and not the northern milkweed. It was not introduced into Texas but is native. Old cattlemen here state its juice makes a more deceptive brand forgery than any other method. I enclose a specimen of the plant. John Herring, now county clerk here and a ranchman in this section since 1865, states that cows often have the hair burned from their legs after passing through a patch of this "milkweed." By the way, Rockport is on Akansas Bay six miles from the Gulf of Mexico and not far from Indianola on Matagorda. It was, in the late '60's and '70's, the seat of the packing industry in Texas and one of the greatest shipping points for cattle. Wonder why I have never seen it mentioned in *Adventure*? Am at work now on its history.—GEO. C. MARTIN.

Rockport, Texas.

An old cattleman here, Mr. Fate L. Hamilton, born Williamson Co., Texas, 1864, has just brought me in some specimens of "Button Snake Root." This was a remedy for snake-bite used by the Indians and used by Mrs. Hamilton in the early days in Texas. It is said to be absolutely a "cure" if used in time. The way it was used was to wash up the roots, boil it in sweet milk and make a "tea" of it. The "tea" was drunk hot and the residue of the root was used on the wound as a poultice. I am enclosing specimen herewith so that if you are interested you can have its identity looked up. Have no reference works here at present.—GEORGE CASTOR MARTIN.

AN ANECDOTE of Cecil Rhodes quoted by L. Patrick Greene in connection with his complete novelette in this issue:

Marlow-on-Thames, England.

The story has its origin in fact.

After the Matabele rebellion of 1896 a young non-commissioned officer of the Rhodesian Mounted reported to Rhodes, who was passing through his district, that a local chief was mutinous and required to be dealt with promptly.

Rhodes said that he had no authority and suggested that the officer report to the commanding officer of the British South Africa Company's forces.

The officer scoffed at this idea, believing that only Rhodes had power to act in this matter, that only Rhodes could fully understand the gravity of the situation. He repeated his complaint against the chief, adding—

"He even defies me, sir."

According to Sir Lewis Mitchell, in his "Life of Cecil John Rhodes," the following dialogue then took place—

Rhodes: "How did the chief defy you?"

Officer: "He jeered at me."

Rhodes: "Jeering does not constitute a *casus belli*."

Officer: "Well, I'm blest! What does, sir?"

Rhodes: "I'll tell you what you can do. You go right up to the kraal and be fired at. That will be a *casus belli*."

Officer: "Very good, sir. I'll go on Wednesday."

Two days later the officer rode in, bringing the chief a prisoner. He had gone up to the kraal on the Wednesday, had shouted abuse at the chief. This was too much for the old rebel and he ordered his warriors to open fire on the impertinent white man. That was the excuse the officer was looking for. Single handed he stormed the kraal, captured the chief and put an end to a menace to which his superiors were blind.

HERE'S a comrade who doesn't seem much impressed with the terrors and wonders of a certain exploring trip into the wilds of Central America:

Cristobal, C. Z.

I had a really amusing time in reading the clipping *re* Lady Richmond Brown and Mitchell Hedge's trip up into the Chucunacque Indian territory. It's *good*—if true, but, as I glance over your recap of the review, it's a scream.

EASTER—in 1924, I believe—a party of school ma'ams, "Temporary" bachelors and a proper number of chaperons left Panama City on (I believe) the *S. S. Ligia Elena*—a Dusel engined craft—*en route* for the terrible Chucunacqui Indian territory: after the usual trip of 20 hours we arrived at Yairsa, on the Tulera River, at which point we anchored.

The following morning, attended by Indian guides, we made a trip by Cayuccas to Casa Blanca—at which place the Chief of the Chucanacqui tribe (so-called)resides. The usual thatched house, set upon stilts, split black palm floor and open sides was used as his home. Tall, slim, well-built scions of nobility—his various progeny—met us at the river's edge. After a chat in Spanish we moved on up to the house. Admired the babies, photoed the Indians, singly and in groups, and purchased, with Domino Sugar, cash and empty Springfield cartridge cases, about all the household goods and gods, bows and arrows, etc. that could be found.

PRESENTED the chief with some quinine, salts and pills for which he was vehemently thankful. Spent the day there, eating our lunch at the chief's house and late in the afternoon returned to Yairsa.

The Indians seem the highest educated met so far here: Spanish spoken well and understood. The Indians as a tribe seem far superior in physique and intelligence to any of the other local varieties met. All in all don't appear to be the type to be impressed by red fire and mummery. Mr. Markham, of the Panama R. R., can probably give you more comprehensive descriptions of the Indian tribes from the Darien to the Chucanacqui than any other white man in Central America. He was on this trip also.—L. C. LEIGHTON.

And here's a letter from another comrade:

THE MIRAFLORES CLUB,
Pedro Miguel, Canal Zone.

DEAR COMRADES:—In the issue of August 20th are some comments on the expedition of Lady Richmond Brown and Mitchell-Hedges. Our friend from Australia has the right impression.

The answer, may it please the court, is a general demurrer.

THE Brown-Hedges outfit went fishing in various parts of this region, and caught some out-of-the-ordinary fish, etc., and they visited the San Blas, or Tule Indians along the North coast, also went a short distance up the Chucunaque River, probably one day's cayuca travel above the old town of Yavisa, which is near the junction of the Chucunaque and Tuyra rivers.

These rivers, joining near Yavisa, become the principal tributary of the Gulf of San Miguel, some hundred miles east of Panama City and the southern terminus of the Canal.

The Indians of the Chucunaque are mostly Chocoi, in the lower reaches, bordering on the Wallas farther up, with a sprinkling of Cuna-Wallas along various parts of the upper river. They are quite accustomed to seeing whites and near-whites, and there have been contacts with whites ever since the first Spanish explorations, four hundred years ago.

YAVISA was one of the original block-house settlements along the original Spanish trail from the Darien to Acla and Santa Maria de la Antigua.

This is substantially the route of Balboa's journey of discovery, when he first saw the Pacific, guided by the Indians. Also, he transported his materials for boat building over about this route when he attempted to prepare for the conquest of Peru, an enterprize carried out by his lieutenant and companion, Pizarro.

Lieut. Strain, U.S.N., and his party crossed the

Isthmus from a point near Acla, on the Caribbean coast, coming down the Chucunaque to Yavisa. Strain's party got into trouble with the Indians, probably the Wallas, who are said to be the most warlike and who inhabit the upper river and mountain country, and several of Strain's party were killed. This was about 1850.

Very recently, the Richard O. Marsh expedition safely traversed this region, going in *via* Yavisa and coming out near Acla on the north coast. One American member of the expedition, Dr. Baer, lost his life through the infected bite of some insect, and Mr. Marsh told me that he had buried Dr. Baer's body within a hundred yards of the spot where Balboa was beheaded, at Acla.

One often meets Chocoi Indians on the streets of Panama City, where they come to trade, traveling in their large dug-out cayucas. I talked with a party of six on Central Ave. only a short time ago, and the Chief invited me to visit them.

The Wallas, who inhabit the plateau between the headwaters of the Chucunaque, Savanna and Bayano rivers, very rarely have any direct contact with whites or any outsiders, but they are not the credulous, easily-overawed savages that our friends would have us believe. They do not like strangers to come into their territory, having seen too much grief come to their race because of the grasping, cruel tactics of the invader.

The Wallas are allied, politically, with the Tule, commonly called "San Blas," whose territory borders the Wallas on the north and extends out into the Caribbean Islands. These tribes or nations speak various dialects of Cuna or Tule, while the Chocoi have a language more closely allied to Chibchan, whose ancient territory they border on the east, toward Colombia.

Since the Tule uprising, in February, the Panama Government has prohibited foreigners from residing among the Indians of the San Blas, blaming Mr. Marsh with stirring up that trouble. But there is a whole lot to that which has not appeared on the surface.

I could lay my hands on half a dozen men any day who are familiar with the upper Chucunaque country for several days' journey above Yavisa, —quite a distance beyond where the Brown-Hedges outfit gave it up.

But after eleven years living hereabouts I am convinced that in regard to the majority of jungle tales most of it didn't happen and the balance is like what Mark Twain said about the report of his death—"Greatly exaggerated."

I could cite a quantity of references, with an extensive bibliography, but what's the use? As Elbert Hubbard said, "Never explain. Your friends don't require it, and the other fellow won't believe you anyway."—E. St. Clair Clayton.

NIGHT glasses and prismatic glasses—some underlying principles and a simple test as to number of diameters magnified. From a Canadian comrade.

East Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.

In your September 20th "Ask Adventure" there is a reply by Mr. Beriah Brown on the subject of night glasses. The answer is all right as far as it goes, but gives very little information on a very important topic. I can imagine many cases in which adventurers' lives would depend on glasses—seeing castaways on a raft at a distance, picking out hostile natives from friendly ones by some detail in dress far enough away to give time for defense—and yet how few people understand anything about the science of optics, which is very simple.

NIGHT glasses can be made out of any sort of telescope or field glasses, yet as in most other things it pays to specialize. To see well in the dark you must use first of all glasses with large object glasses so as to gather more light; if the pupil of your eye enlarges in the dark so must the lens of your glass. It is a simple rule of proportion: if the lens of an eye, whatever be its diameter, gathers so much light, a lens an inch in diameter will gather so much more, a lens an inch and a half more again and so on.

Having illuminated the object you want to examine by a large lens, the next thing is to see you are not wasting that light by a high magnifying power. With every increase in magnifying power you lose light by spreading it over a greater area.

Night glasses should thus be glasses of great light-gathering power and low magnification.

By the way, why all the fuss about prismatic glasses? They are beautiful things but very expensive and of low power. Very few of them magnify more than 12 diameters and it is a poor telescope that doesn't magnify 25 diameters. You can now buy a telescope for a song at a second-hand store better than any prismatic glass. Before buying try this simple test. Level the telescope at a row of bricks or shingle. Let the right eye look through the glass and the open left eye look at the same objects. Count how many bricks are seen by the naked eye are covered by one brick as magnified. Nobody can then fool you as to the magnifying power. The first time you do this it may be a little difficult, but once you've done it, it comes easy afterward.—T. L. Gillepsie.

ASSUMING the role of hero (or worse) I grasp this bombshell in both hands, lay it at your feet and depart very, very hastily before it explodes. I agree with our comrade that most of us are "boobs" and very sleepy ones, and you know my feelings on anti-weapon laws, but for the rest, well, I'm merely handing you this little bombshell and getting off where I can hear it explode without being hit by any of the pieces.

Philadelphia, Oct., 14, 1925.

Last evening there was published in one of our newspapers an item relative to the fact "that the President of the United States had a bill before him for his signature prohibiting the sale of firearms." The item states that the President, before signing it, wishes to consult with the police, as he fears that such a bill will prevent citizens procuring the protection of self and property and that he believes it

will not prevent the criminal class from procuring what they may require.

IT IS a well known fact, that the great body of citizens in this country are unorganized and there seems to be no way to do it. A few, may I say fanatics, get together and organize and from some unknown source seem to get almost untold thousands in money and, while we "boobs" sleep, these fanatics get some foolish law passed.

Now it is a well known fact that most so called reformers are reformers only for what they can personally get out of it—not all, but the greater majority. Many of them, under the cloak of religion, have prostituted their calling and use their sacred office for sowing discontent, race and religious hatred, instead of preaching the divine word of God.

It is not my intention here to argue right or wrong about Prohibition. We have it; it is the law and should be obeyed. I have been on the inside of the cause and as a boy even then saw the "graft" at a time when few men would even acknowledge they were members of a temperance society. I have even been elected a delegate to a National Prohibition Convention and, believe me, I was sent word that I would not "be seated." Several letters passed between the National Secretary and myself and, when I exposed to him that I perhaps knew more of the inner workings then he, he accused me of not "being a gentleman" and the usual things that prohibition fanatics get off. But the "boobs" sat by and let them change the Constitution of the United States.

NOW these so called reformers' next move will be to prohibit the use of tobacco and they will surely get the bill through. Why? We "boobs" will sit by and let them.

After that is done their next move perhaps will prohibit chewing-gum. Some lordly man, perhaps woman, will arise and organize an association to suppress the automobile; they will show by count the great destruction each year caused by said machine and a law will be passed prohibiting the manufacture, sale or use of the automobile. Yes, "boobs," laugh—that is all we do when such things are proposed. We laugh, but the other side pull it off. Look at the organizations that today are starting in every section of this country and the unfortunate part is that frequently they get a lot of fool ministers into these organizations to sow race and religious hatred in the greatest country God gave to the world.

Were I a member of any such church, reading as I do some of the so-called sermons in the Monday papers, where a man is supposed to preach the word of God but instead preaches hatred of one another and in a country where it is said that 75% of the people are not church members, I would resign. They say that in this country religion and politics must not mix. Ye gods! who is in politics more than the ministers? It is said that one religion has lobbies in every State capitol and even our National one and wo to the politician who will not support their pet bill. They are denounced by these same ministers in the church, where the word of God is supposed to be preached and brotherly love carried out. That is why we have so many fool laws. The ministers are organized and the "boobs" are not. I belong to the "boob" class. Watch for the next fool law.—JOS. LYNDALL.

IS THIS, then, the longest jump by horse and rider that is on record? E. E. Harriman sends us a reply from a comrade who answers his inquiry at a former Camp-Fire:

Toronto, Canada.

In an October number you ask for authenticated jump records made by horse and rider. I am enclosing a paper cutting from the Toronto *Star Weekly*, 9.27.25, and I find in an old copy of *Bells Life in London*, which is now incorporated with that well known sheet *The Sporting Life* of London, England, the following record at Warwick on March 23, 1847. The steeplechase horse Chandler jumped 37 feet which has been known by sportsmen as Chandler's Leap to the present day and I think, sir, that we can accept this as true. My reason for saying so is that I have known some of those old-time sportsmen in England and the United States and there is no better man on earth than a good sportsman.

I have read with interest and pleasure several of your letters, having been a reader of *Adventure* for the past five years. My knowledge of your great country commenced away back. In 1888 helped Jim Hill build the G. Northern over the Rockies. Was in Kalispell when it was only a few months old—and what a town it was, wide open day and night, and what men one met. They were indeed the salt of the earth. Was back in Choteau, Teton Co., Montana, in 1890—about twenty houses all told. I think myself lucky that I was in time to see some of the glory of the old-time West.—ARTHUR E. INNES.

The Toronto *Star* quotes Mrs. Barbara Miller, visiting Canada from England:

"The best thing I ever did myself on a horse was to jump 32 feet over what is known as the Ashwell leap, near my home in Rutlandshire. The mare that did it is still in my father's stables at Oakham. All the measurements were taken by a representative of the *Field* newspaper."

Mr. Harriman's reply to Mr. Innes:

Los Angeles, Cal.

Your letter reached me yesterday afternoon and I acknowledge its receipt with pleasure. I am glad that I succeeded in starting an influx of data regarding the broad jump by saddlers, though I must own that I blundered in one respect. I had in mind our cow ponies and the common run of saddlers, when I wrote that letter to Camp-Fire. I knew the hunters and steeplechasers had been known to make astounding leaps, just as I knew that a few high jumpers had distanced the ordinary by several feet. It was stupid of me to not specify the type of nag.

I am glad to receive authentic data regarding broad jumping by a class of horse bred to that particular stunt. My jumping was done on saddle horse that had no such strain of blood or training, merely such horses as I rode in rounding up cattle. Sure-footed, cat-like in turns and gifted with great endurance, but not real jumpers. However, I

wrote what was virtually a challenge and so let it go at that.

My dinky little jump is in the discard now, a mere nothing, though done on a common scrub horse. But would your English huntsman stick if on a horse that came out to a pitch of forty five degrees at full speed and leaped straight out?

I have known a mounted cowboy to do that in California, and the point where the horse touched the slope first was so far down that mountainside that we all expected him to break a leg or go end over, but he struck, kept his feet and went off quartering as though that was an every day affair with him. Nobody thought of measuring that leap, we were all so relieved to see the horse and man survive, unhurt. Lucky the slope was deep under soft sand.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

AN EDITORIAL from the Lewiston *Journal*, reprinted by the Boston *Transcript* is sent in to us by Carl L. Flanders of Amesbury, Mass. It makes a point against the anti-weapon campaign that I have made in a general way at Camp-Fire but does a better job of it than I did.

Perhaps the laws which make it a crime to carry guns are not so wise as we have thought, though the theory back of them has always sounded good. If men are not armed when flashes of anger come to them, they will not become killers, we say. Promiscuous carrying of guns breeds crimes and makes gun-men. That is the argument.

But the laws operate to disarm law-abiding citizens only. The crook and the crank pay no attention to them. They can always contrive to get weapons. No law can prevent this. The result of the anti-firearm laws is to leave the masses at a disadvantage against their predatory enemies, the crooks.

Under the theory of our Government, every citizen is a peace officer. It is his duty to report crime, to seize criminals, to cooperate with the police. The citizenry branch of the law-enforcement service. Why should it be kept the most powerless?

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Edmund M. Littell rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. As to the hesitation mentioned in the last part of his letter, whenever a writer finds real adventure at the door-step there is no need to go far afield.

When I read of the travels and experiences of other writers for *Adventure*, I feel mighty humble about saying anything concerning my own activities. My travel has generally been over the prescribed routes. My life has been as tame as that of a tabby cat.

AFTER I graduated from Wabash College in 1911 I spent two years in making wheat land out of a square mile of virgin prairie southwest of Winnipeg. Nothing exciting; only hard, grubbing toil with a tractor and gang plow. I drove that tractor twelve hundred miles—at the rate of two miles an hour—in those two years. Nothing to look at but flat prairie with a mile-long furrow of black soil ahead of the chugging engine. The horizon was broken in two distant spots by small groves of trees, planted by farmers who arrived a few years before. On Sunday afternoons I used to ride over to them and lie on the ground looking up at the leaves. That was a holiday!

One summer I spent west of the Rockies, below Steamboat Springs, then came back to go into business. A desk, a pencil, dictation, everything but excitement. The drop forging business (do you know what drop forging is, by the way? Lots of people don't) occupied my time for a few years. Watching bars of steel forged into intricate shapes between the dies on a drop hammer, I became interested in the steel itself, and that was my next move. A short time after that the war came along, and the nearest I approached the vital conflict was in having a few ducking acquaintances with Big Bertha shells. Yes, I fit the battle o' Paris—and Tours. As 1st Lieut. in ordnance I was helping put teeth on the birds of war—machine-guns on airplanes. More steel, you see.

THEN back to steel again. There, sir, is romance far too great for my poor efforts. If I don't watch out I'll let my enthusiasm get away with me, for the steel industry is—well, what has followed men in their penetration of unknown lands? Steel, in the shape of rails and trains, bringing transportation to tie the east and the west, the north and the south. What has brought continents close together? Steel, in the shape of floating carriers that defy the elements. What most concerned the nations recently at war? Steel! And what did France do when Germany threatened to cease reparations payments? Seized her most valuable possessions, the Ruhr Valley, where they made—steel! Last, and perhaps seldom thought of in this way, what does every hero and every villain use when he gets into action? Steel, either as a naked blade, a blued bar with a hole drilled in it, or—a shovel!

Perhaps you can understand why it is that I write about steel, and try to present it in an interesting fashion. This industry supplies the very skeleton of our civilization, yet it is as little thought of as the human framework—until a piece of it gets busted! The observer who sees a fire-marked sky says "steel mill" without thinking of what it means. He does not see the gigantic work that goes on amid those man-made hells; the thousands of men who labor prosaically in the most spectacular surroundings ever devised by man. These men live and die as others. Their emotions may be dulled by fatigue, or blistered raw by the fires they serve, but they are all of the same stuff as the man who rides the cushioned steel Pullman on the rails thay have made.

You see? My enthusiasm gets away with me! Well, that's why I like to write about these men, their hates and loves and struggles. To that end I quit my job a year ago and have been writing about them ever since.

I felt rather hesitant about submitting a story of steel to *Adventure* because of its remoteness from the

atmosphere which its stories generally depict. A fenced-in yard full of enormous buildings of corrugated iron would not seem to be the place of romance. Certainly it is anything but one of the world's open spaces. But the courage of men is there, none the less. And now that the tale is accepted and I'm writing my Camp-Fire letter, I write—more steel!

That's all. If my story succeeds in arousing appreciation of the gigantic things that are being done even while this is read, I'm delighted. As for me, I'm grateful to sit by the blaze and listen to tales of far-flung adventure.—EDMUND M. LITTELL.

A DOG in Bruce Johns' story, "Big 'Un," ate raw salmon and it brought the following letter which I sent to Mr. Johns:

Haverstraw, New York.

In "Big 'Un" the writer mentions salmon as part of the dog's diet. I spent a couple of years on the Clackamas River, close to a Govt. fish hatchery, and it seemed to be an accepted fact thereabouts that raw salmon would surely kill a dog and almost kill a domestic cat. The hatchery men all kept their dogs muzzled during the salmon runs and I knew personally of the death of a number of dogs—notably an airedale pup for which I had just paid fifty dollars—which apparently came from eating salmon. The authorities were not agreed upon *why* raw fish killed the dogs, and almost killed the cats, but they were quite agreed that it did. Cooked fish did not harm either. Of course every one knew that all the wild animals, both of the dog and cat persuasions and about every other sort, preyed upon the salmon at every opportunity. No one even attempted to account for the fact that the domestic animal was killed and the wild was not. If you know anything about this I would be much interested in hearing it. —SHIRLEY C. HULSE.

Mr. Johns, after some investigation, wrote to Mr. Hulse:

Sausalito, California.

Your interesting comment on my story, "Big 'Un," came as a big surprize to me, but not to the faculty of the animal husbandry department of the University of California to whom I applied for advice.

First, however, I went to the family that for a long time had Big 'Un. They said often they fed him raw salmon and that nothing happened to him. He was an exceptionally husky dog, however.

But you are right—fresh water salmon does kill dogs in many instances. This has been investigated I find, for the past 25 years without solution. But only a few days ago, faculty experts of the Oregon University, Corvallis, found it.

It is this: A "fluke" parasite has been found in salmon frequenting fresh water. It is not in salt water salmon, and no salt water salmon has ever killed a dog. It apparently gets into the fish after they get into fresh water. The parasite seems to be liberated only after getting into the dog. Just what disease is set up has not been determined. The dog usually dies in seven days. Remember, however, that not all dogs are stricken.—BRUCE JOHNS.

To which Mr. Hulse replied:

Haverstraw, New York.

I spent two years, about 1910 on the Clackamas River above Estacada and there was a hatchery just below the Cazadero dam. It was from the hatchery man that I got the pup—and the warning about feeding him raw salmon. I didn't feed it to him but he got it all right. This seems to be one case where animal instinct doesn't function, because I understand that dogs are crazy for the fish. The hatchery men had a vague notion that it was "the phosphorus in the fish" that killed the dogs but they couldn't of course put up much in the way of defense of their idea and isn't it curious that my interest should have been revived by your story just in time to get me the information—red hot so to speak, through you from the University? I have come, after many years of observation, to be a firm believer in "Old Man Co-Incidence."

I carried a camera just like I wore a shirt in those days and I got a lot of pictures around the hatchery and of salmon trying to get up over the dam (it was 40 ft. high) that Grosvenor of the *National Geographic* said were the best pictures of free fish he knew about—he printed quite a lot of them. Of course the "free fish" was because of the Dimmock stuff of tarpon fighting after they had been hooked and I guess no one has ever equaled that stuff—I know mine didn't. I remember too my disgust with a Selig outfit who refused flatly to take a moving picture camera up there and work on those fish after I had spent months finding out when and how to photograph them. "We are not in educational work" was the best I got, and since then I have seen *bum* salmon pictures get all sorts of applause out of a movie audience.

Thank you ever so much for your letter, and if you ever get up on the Clackamas, chuck a cigaret butt in the old creek for me—I've chucked many a one in it myself.—S. C. HULSE.

Which clears it all up except why don't said parasites injure wild animals? Not that I insist upon knowing, but merely by way of wondering a bit.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in next issue.*)

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: Aug. 30 to Sept. 20, Oct. 10 to Dec. 30—1923. Jan. 10 and 20, Feb. 20 and 30, March 10, 20, 30, May 20, Sept. 30, Oct. 30, Nov. 10, Dec. 20 and 30—1924.—Address BOLLING ARTHUR JOHNSON, Lumber World Review, 17th Floor, Transportation Building, 608 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

WILL SELL: June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct.—1915. All except first Jan., mid-March, mid-May, mid-Sept—1921. March 18, Aug. 3, Dec. 18—1920. All except April 30 1922. All except May 20—1923. All except Sept. 30—1924. All through Aug. 15—1925. What offer for all or any?—Address THOS. M. WATTS, 1535 Main St., Columbia, N. C.

WILL SELL: 7 issues 1916; 4—1917; 14—1919; 20—1920; 22—1921; 18—1923; 19—1924; 13—1925. $5.00 for the lot, purchaser to pay transportation.—Address, P. H. MITCHELL, 491 Grand St., Bridgeport, Conn.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to LAURENCE JORDAN.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**

2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**

3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**

4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**

5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4—6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
7, 8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
9. Australia and Tasmania
10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
11. New Guinea
12, 13. Philippine and Hawaiian Islands
14—18. Asia. In Five Parts
19—26. Africa. In Eight Parts
27, 28. Turkey and Asia Minor
29—35. Europe. In Six Parts
36—38. South America. In Three Parts
39. Central America.
40—42. Mexico. In Three Parts
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52. Alaska
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54—59. Western U. S. In Six Parts
60—64. Middle Western U. S. In Five Parts
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A. Radio
B. Mining and Prospecting
C. Old Songs That Men Have Sung
D 1—3. Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
E. Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
F, G. Forestry in the U. S. and Tropical Forestry
H—J. Aviation, Army and Navy Matters
K. American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
L. First Aid on the Trail
M. Health-Building Outdoors
N. Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
O. P. Herpetology and Entomology
Standing Information

Gold in Peru

PROSPECTING among eighty-six different kinds of Indians.

Request:—"I have been thinking of making a trip to South America for quite a while so I thought I would write to you for a little first-hand information.

Would like to try Columbia or Ecuador. I want to get into a country where a fellow with an ordinary education and no qualifications for any special line of work could make a fair stake. Say at prospecting or anything that comes along. I figured on going to Panama, and from there down the west coast, or else go to Colon and from there up the Magdalena River. Which would be the best?

I am willing to spend quite a few years down there if I could come back half-way independent. I have not got a partner so am going alone. Now for some questions:

1. How far would $200 go toward an outfit down there to just bum around the mountains with a couple of mules?

2. Does a person need a passport from Panama to Colombia? What do they cost? Can you get one in Panama?

3. Do you think this trip is a practical possibility?

This letter is not exactly clear, I know.

But I just want to try something new that will make me some money.

4. Which would be the best country for my purpose, Columbia or Ecuador?——, Culver City, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—Colombia and Ecuador offer a fair chance for a prospector's finding a paying ledge or creek, but I think, looking at it from your angle, that Peru would offer the best opportunity. First I would consider going to some large American operated mine, such as the Cerro de Pasco Copper Co. mine at Cerro de Pasco (or Fundicion) Peru, and working for a few months to get used to the country and pile up a little more money for a stake and then outfit at their commissary and hit out along the eastern slopes of the Andes for a few months and then if no luck come back to the mine and work another couple of months for a second try.

This company will not hire a man and ship him down there without he is a highly trained expert of some sort, but if a fellow happens in on his own he is usually almost certain to get a good job, better than he could get here so far as money and living conditions are concerned, as they own their own quarters and feed a man at a trifle above cost. In Ecuador there is a railroad called the G & Q which runs up to Quito from Guayaquil and if a man could catch on with this road for a couple of months, he could then outfit and hit the hills of Ecuador.

There are known to be many streams on the upper Napo and Cururay Rivers that are gold bearing as the Indians pan quite a bit of it from the sands and send it out for trade. Some of the streams don't furnish much and the Indians don't save it all with their wooden *bateas* (wooden pans) but with quite a number of them after it, they sometimes have a cigar-boxful to show. A man could possibly find good sluicing ground around streams of this sort.

The entire eastern slopes of Peru and Ecuador, consisting of several thousand square miles, is almost unexplored. There are known to be eighty-six different sorts of Indians over there, ranging from extremely tame to extremely savage (head-hunters and cannibals). You will usually be warned away from the bad ones by the friendly ones when you are a hundred miles away.

The way you get up to the Cerro de Pasco mine is from Callao. There is a railroad running all the way, or in fact two railroads. The junction is at Oroya. This railroad takes you up over the Andes at an altitude of 15,865 feet and drops you down to 14,400 on the other side. Your prospecting country would lay on the slopes from there on down to the Amazon basin which is only a few hundred feet above sea level. The best way to do is to get down to about five thousand feet above sea level and then cut north and south so as to cross all the streams flowing down and prospect any likely ones. If you wanted to come out on the east side, you can float down to Iquitos from which city ships sail to New York and Europe. This place is a couple of thousand miles up the Amazon.

Write Pan American Union, Washington, D. C. for free booklets *Ecuador* and *Peru*. Also go to your public library and read accounts of these two republics in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

It doesn't take much of an outfit for a prospector. A small pick and shovel and a pan, some sort of a rifle from a muzzle loader to a high-power repeater, a blanket, a tarp, some rice, some beans, a slab of sow-belly, some flour, a frying-pan and some sort of a small can or pot to boil things in, one of Woolworth's coffee-pots, some seasoning and a few other things. You can wrap most of it in the blanket roll and tie the rest on.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do NOT write to the magazine itself.

Homesteading On the Pacific Coast

TWO or three crops a year.

Request:—"I intend to start west, seeking for a place where I can settle on a small farm or homestead. This has been my ambition for years and it is for this that I have saved a little money.

Now, imposing on your indulgence, I wish to ask if there is any place in California, Oregon or Washington that you would recommend me to examine? I wish a place very near or among mountains, a place where there is good scenery, healthful climate, agreeable neighbors, cheap land and an opportunity to start with very little, and by patient, steady industry make a living and found a home. They tell me that there is opportunity for genuine workers in the West. Is this true? Is there a chance for a chap sick of cities, who is willing to work hard (that point I stress as my pecuniary resources are not high) who is a quiet student and who desires a peaceful, quiet life?

Please give this appeal your careful and mature consideration. I am nearly twenty years of age and am free to choose my way. Have worked on a farm and like it, sweat and all.

They say that out in the West they are more ready

to aid you, are more sympathetic. Prove this, Mr. Harriman, by a full and concise answer to this appeal."—GEORGE ROSENBERGER, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Harriman:—I have been proving my readiness to aid others for enough years to make it an established fact, according to my belief.

First, there is no more homestead land open that is worth a fee. Second, I do not, can not, keep posted on prices of land in my great territory. Third, farm land in this part of California is high-priced, because here we can do what they can not do elsewhere, raise two or three crops a year on the same ground. Imperial Valley has proved that three crops are possible there, by raising them on several farms. In other places two crops are often gathered.

Land is much cheaper farther north and it produces less of a variety. When I was in Humboldt County, California, in 1919, I found that less than a third as many kinds of produce could be raised in that county as are raised down here.

I know one man who came here from New York and bought 5 acres. He told me after he had been here three years, that he rented out 4 acres at $40 an acre and lived on the other. From the one acre he had taken in $800 in the year just ended. He was a man 71 years old and an expert truck gardener.

A friend of mine has been making $500 an acre profit raising winter peas, about 20 miles east of where I sit now.

Of course these are exceptional cases, but the fact is that we can raise much more to the acre here. Let me tell you what was done last year in the Delta region, in the part where the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers come together, east of San Francisco.

Potato crops showed insect pests and diseases were thick in the peat-land. They burned 1,500 acres to a depth of 4 inches, keeping it even by raising the water level just right. The fire was quenched by flooding. Then they plowed 9 inches deep, pulverized the peat and sowed 500 pounds of fertilizer to the acre. Then they raised a world's record crop, averaging 960 bushels to the acre.

This is just to let you see what California can do.

TO GET into the mountains and make a living, you would just about be compelled to raise apples, cherries and the like. If you had five acres of good mountain land, capable of raising strawberries, you could make good money in that way. You probably could from two acres, as my friend Gates told me he took $2,000 off one acre one year in berries.

But such land costs from $500 up to $1,500 an acre here.

Another thing. During the last five years the people have poured in here from east of the Rockies in such numbers, that the State is full, as far as present industries go. We had no period of depression following the war, as other States had. It hit us this last fall only. Business is fair now, but not good. Folks are living, but not making any money to invest. That is the present condition of California.

What you should do is to work a year or two for a California farmer and so learn our methods. They are very different from those in the East. The ideal method to my notion is to work in that manner, learn all you can, then buy about 15 acres on time and make it pay the debt. If a man can handle the land understandingly, he can do it.

A man who is a worker and has expert knowledge of how to handle his land, if he locates where he can carry his produce into a market, can generally make good money on a small tract.

I have a brother-in-law who has made himself independent from 15 acres. Has an income around $8,000 a year now, from a standing start.

But, whole lots of folks fail at it, for one reason or another.

It is no snap, this making a living off 15 or 20 acres. Never believe that it is, for you will get fooled if you do. It takes brains and energy and persistence to make a go of it.

I have seen many men start small here and expand year by year, until now they are wealthy. I have seen others go flat broke.

I used to know a Chinaman here, Charlie Goon or some such name. He rented land, peat-land, where he had to pay $40 an acre rent. When he harvested his crop of potatoes from that land and sold it, he had $2,100 net profit from the one crop. He went back to China, rich.

IT TAKES a lot of hard work to do things like that and a good amount of business ability into the bargain. So the best thing you or any other man can do who wants to farm here, is to work for others until he has learned the California methods, the soils, et cetera.

He can go on a trip now and then and see what the chances are in various places. After he has done that is time enough to decide where he wants to locate.

Never jump until you know where you will land. A large majority of the folks who come here and lose money can blame their losses on too much haste and not enough sober study of the land, transportation, water and market problems.

I met a former cattleman of Arizona here and asked him what he was doing outside of Arizona. He laughed.

"I got tired of raising cattle. Now I am raising head lettuce and I get 90 cents a crate, delivered at the station half a mile from my field. Look that field over and guess how many crates I get to the acre. No more stock-raising for me," he said.

He was making big money, yet his next neighbor might be losing at the same game. It takes knowledge, common sense, energy, judgment.

So you take my advice and work for other folks a few years, before you spread yourself out here. As Brown of Imperial Valley did. Came there with $800 and worked for a farmer two years. Then bought 10 acres on time, put in a crop and went back to his old job. Harvested the crop at the proper time, planted another and went on working for wages.

In eight years he told me he had boosted his capital from $800 to something over $16,000, as the 10 acres had been doubled twice.

HE PLANNED to sell half, 20 acres, and go on cropping 20, as he was working too hard and felt that a man of 48 had a right to take it more moderately. He knew the 20 would support the family in fine shape. So why, since he had no debts, should he kill himself for more dollars?

There are a good many men in Imperial and other valleys here who began in that way, working as

hired men on farms, and now are well-fixed owners. Do not buy anywhere until you have considered every angle, so that you know what the soil will do, plus all other matters I have mentioned.

There is no local prejudice against men from outside. Most of us came from other parts in the first place, so why should we object to other men?

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Insect Bites

AN antidote that comes out through the pores.

Request:—"Please send me full information on treating and preventing insect bites."—V. HOWARD, Titusville, Fla.

Reply, by Dr. Fordyce:—Prevention of insect bites is by applying to the exposed skin preparations such as Nessmuks, which is composed as follows:

Pine tar	1½ ounces
Castor oil	1 ounce
Oil pennyroyal	½ ounce

Simmer over a slow fire and when cool carry in a screw-top tin. In use apply freely to the skin and it will produce a glaze which with the repellent oil of pennyroyal is very effective. Some do not like the odor of this mixture although it is my preference. Another one is as follows:

Oil citronella	1 ounce
Spirits of camphor	1 ounce
Oil cedar	½ ounce

To be shaken well before applying to skin.

An insect repellent used in the tropics is called "bamber oil" and composed of:

Oil citronella	1½ ounces
Kerosene	1 ounce
Coconut oil	2 ounces

I am told that Peary used a drug internally which was excreted through the skin pores. It is called calcium sulphide and is taken in one-grain tablets until the sweat is noticeably the odor of rotten eggs. It is not harmful to take and is used by the medical profession to fortify the patient's system against infection.

Treating insect's bites is to relieve the irritation, and the so-called analgesic balm is good. Weak carbolic acid solution is also good or carbolized salve.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Seamen

JOBS in Southern ports.

Request:—"I am a boy 18 years old. I am a high-school graduate. I haven't had any experience on a ship.

Please answer the following questions.

1. Do they have many vacant jobs on ships that go to foreign countries from Charleston, S. C., or from Norfolk, Va.?

2. What kind of job could I do without any experience?

3. What foreign countries do they ship to mostly from Charleston, S. C.?"—GORDON T. GAULT, Whitesburg, Ky.

Reply, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—Seamanship, like any other class of skilled labor, affords poor chances of employment to the green hand, as long as competent men are available, as they usually are. You might get a chance to ship on a vessel out of Charleston; where very few vessels load for overseas, or at Norfolk, which has become one of the greatest ports on the Atlantic. The only way to find out is to go where ships are and try.

American freight steamships ship their crews for the round voyage. Some small steamships take a cargo of cotton out of Charleston, for European ports, but many more load with cotton at New Orleans or Galveston. Norfolk takes more wheat and flour and general cargoes for all parts of the world. Don't know any billet that would be open to you, without any sea experience, save as coal passer or mess boy; although occasionally green hands are taken on and rated as ordinary seamen. On the other hand, the Navy is always glad to get recruits of your age and training; and you are likely to see more of the world as an enlisted man in the Navy than as a foremast hand on a merchant vessel.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose FULL return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Arioi

AN ALMOST forgotten South Sea Island society with very strange practises indeed.

Request:—"Can you give me any information about a secret society there is in Tahiti, which goes under the name of 'Areosis.' "

A friend of mine, who is a surgeon, informs me, that to become a member of the Areosis, it is necessary for the candidate, if he has any children, to murder them. It is a native society, of course. I thank you for any information you may be able to give to yours sincerely."—PERCY L. BLACKWELL.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—Your surgical friend has in mind the almost forgotten Arioi society.

The Arioi was a very celebrated order of wandering minstrels, poets, wrestlers, dancers, musicians and clowns. Into it were admitted only those men and women who displayed the greatest histrionic ability, who promised most solemnly, in accepting the rules of the Arioi, not to permit his or her child to survive its birth. A century ago this jolly society was buried by the English Christian missionaries, who have, most unfortunately, left the only written chronicles of the exploits of the Arioi members.

William Ellis, finding in the Arioi adherent the fiercest opponent to the conversion of the Tahitians to Christianity, wrote in his "Polynesian Researches":

"These, though the general amusements of the Arioi, were not the only purposes for which they assembled. They included:

"All monstrous, all prodigious things.

"And these were abominable, unutterable; in some of their meetings, they appear to have placed invention on the rack to discover the worst pollutions of which it was possible for man to be guilty, and to have striven to outdo each other in the most revolting practises. The mysteries of iniquity, and acts of more than bestial degradation, to which they were at times addicted, must remain in the darkness in which even they felt it sometimes expedient to conceal them. I will not do violence to my sensibilities or offend those of my readers, by details of conduct, which the mind can not contemplate without pollution and pain.

"In these pastimes, in their accompanying abominations, and the often-repeated practises of the most unrelenting, murderous cruelty, these wandering Arioi passed their lives, esteemed by the people as a superior order of beings, closely allied to the gods, and deriving from them direct sanction, not only for their abominations, but even for their heartless murders. Free from care or labor, they roved from island to island, supported by the chiefs and priests; and were often feasted with provisions plundered from the industrious husbandman, whose gardens were spoiled by the hands of lawless violence, to provide their entertainments, while his own family were not infrequently deprived thereby for a time, of the means of subsistence. Such was their life of luxurious and licentious indolence and crime."

The above from Ellis. Of course he must have exaggerated the baseness of the Arioi. Ten years he and his devout co-workers combatted the influence of these tropical minstrels. Not until he succeeded in bagging the King of Tahiti, in the tenth year, did Ellis win his first convert to Christianity. And having conquered this king, he shortly won over the Arioi in a solid body. I do believe that Ellis exaggerated, *for home consumption*, the merry, joyous doings of the Arioi. . . .

NOW, the primary rule of the Arioi, that sanctioning infanticide, tended to hold the population of Tahiti, as well as the people of the surrounding islands, at a number that was not a severe drain on the resources of the island. In 1769 Captain Cook estimated the population of Tahiti at seventy thousand. Could this kindly navigator return today, he would count barely ten thousand—a spiritless, anemic ten thousand. . . . So much for the European and American civilization that followed the disruption of the Arioi.

A fifth of the Tahitian population belonged to the Arioi, and all members strangled the children born to them. Many of these babies were buried shortly after birth. It is said, however, that some babies cried so pitifully that the parents, not having the heart or the mind to kill them, gave the little ones away secretly.

But this practise of infanticide *was not* confined to the Arioi. In Tahiti and all the surrounding islands infanticide was working hard to prevent *overpopulation*. As a rule, the first three children of all couples were put out of the way. As many as ten children of one couple died in some instances.

"The bloody heathens." I hear you shout across the land and sea lying so wide and far between us. "What cruelty."

But was it?

Understand that the Tahiti Islander of Ellis' "Polynesian Researches" had thought long and well on the concomitants of overpopulation. And in these far-away vales of eternal summer, where everything—food and shelter and clothing—was the islander's for his taking; where he was free the day long from disease and the innumerable sicknesses that for ever and ever have saddened us and our kin; where a desultory warfare did not deplete his brown-roofed villages—, in these singing vales was known to the last person the maximum that Tahiti could properly sustain. Overpopulation called for a drastic check, and the Arioi, urged by social economy, supplied this check, Infanticide.

By way of contrast, look with me into Japan. Over all the land, from daylight to darkening, her people are in the fields. Every cultivable acre shows green with rice or vegetables. Nothing at all is wasted. Still the food costs go on rising.

Come now to China. Before our eyes millions are dying of starvation. . . . We stop for a little while in India. This is a land in which female infanticide has been practised from time immemorial. Yet we see a population that is increasing faster than it can ever hope to feed itself. . . . We are in Europe. Up and down great stretches of land stalks famine. Still the population multiplies and multiplies. . . . Here in your beloved Brooklyn we look into a mean street. The things we see send us away.

Our world-journey prompts me to again ask——

Was the Arioi cruel?

Looking back to this almost-forgotten society, I see each individual Arioi having some wonderful times. He takes the main part in the dramas, pantomimes, dances and religious ceremonies of his island. He is a maker and a master of the taboo. When war does come to his island, he immediately becomes a leader. From time to time the Arioi chief calls him and his Arioi brothers together. This is when he sails with them in a great fleet of war canoes, paddling from island to island, entertaining and receiving entertainment in return. In his travesties and satires he can ridicule the high priests and go unpunished. And when death removes him from his merry Arioi brethren, he goes to a heaven into which no one but an Arioi can pass. Flower-crowned and gaily painted, he now dances and sings to his jolly god, Oro, who, in turn, will permit him to sit down to an eternity of joy, roast pig, and indolence.

Do you wonder that one-fifth of the Tahitian population belonged to the Arioi?

Accompany your inquiry with stamped, self-addressed envelop.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address JOSEPH COX, *Adventure*, New York.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City.

THIS evening I've just finished playing over a number of the phonograph records I've made in the last three weeks. Altogether there are a hundred and forty, and they cover every type of folk-music—old ballads of long ago, modern work-songs, dance and play songs, spirituals, "banjer" and fiddle tunes—all played or sung, as they should properly be, by people who love them and in many cases have helped to make them. All I can bring to you are the words; I wish it were possible to bring the singers as well.

What has struck me most has been the cordiality with which I have everywhere been received and the eagerness of all I have met to help in the collection. Perhaps most helpful has been Bascom Lamar Lunsford of Asheville, for years a lover and collector of the old songs. He has not only sung for me himself, but has brought in singers and gone into the country with me in search of others.

I'm glad to announce that Mr. Lunsford has consented to associate himself with this department and to become officially our district collector for Western North Carolina.

HERE is one of the old ballads obtained through his assistance. It was sung by Miss Ada Moss, a student at Cullowhee State Normal, as it has come down traditionally in her family.

It would be hard to tell the story more simply or effectively. The song itself comes down to us probably from about the time of Sir Walter Raleigh and neither tune or words have lost their appeal, though both have been modified somewhat as they have passed on from singer to singer.

The Merrie Golden Tree

(Sung by Miss Ada Moss)

There was a little ship all on that sea
And the name that they gave it was the Merrie Golden Tree,
As she sails on the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As the sails on the lonesome sea.

There was another little ship all on that sea,
And the name that they gave it was the Merrie Turkolee,
As she sails on the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails on the lonesome sea.

There was a little boy all on that ship,
And he said, "Captain, captain, what will you give me
If I'll sink that old ship in the middle of the sea,
As she sails on the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails on the lonesome sea?"

"I'll give you money, and I'll pay your fee,
And besides, my oldest daughter I will marry unto you,
If you'll sink her in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
If you'll sink her in the lonesome sea."

He bowed his little head and off swam he,
He swam and he swam till he came to the Merrie Turkolee,
As she sails in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails in the lonesome sea.

He had a little tool all fitted for use,
And he bored nine holes in her old hull at once,
As she sails in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails in the lonesome sea.

He bowed his little head and back swam he,
He swam and he swam till he came to the Merrie Golden Tree
As she sails in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome.
As she sails in the lonesome sea.

He said, "Captain, captain, take me on board
Or you won't be as good as you told me you would,
If I'd sink her in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
If I'd sink her in the lonesome sea."

"I won't give you money, nor I won't pay your fee,
Nor my oldest daughter I'll not marry unto you
And you sunk her in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
And you sunk her in the lonesome sea."

"If it wasn't for the love that I have for your men,
I would do unto you as I did unto them—
I would sink you in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
I would sink you in the lonesome sea."

He bowed his little head and down went he;
He bid farewell to the Merrie Golden Tree
As she sails in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails in the lonesome sea.

NOW I'm going to ask Mr. Lunsford to take down his "banjer" and pick while he sings a modern dance tune. There are endless verses, but not much story.

Cindy, Cindy

(Text of B. L. Lunsford)

O where'd you get your liquor
O where'd you get your dram?
I got it from a nigger
Way down in Rockingham.
O get along home, Cindy, Cindy,
Get along home, Cindy, Cindy,
Get along home, Cindy, Cindy,
I'll marry you sometime.

I went to see my blue eyed girl,
She met me at the door;
Her shoes and stockings in her hand,
Her feet all over the floor.
Cho:

Apple like a cherry,
Cherry like a rose;
How I love my pretty little girl
God in Heaven knows!
Cho:

Cindy's got religion,
She had it once before;
When she hears my old banjo
She's the first one on the floor.
Cho:

Once I had a "banjer"
And every string was twine;
The only tune that I could pick
Was "I wish That Girl Was Mine."
Cho:

I wish I had a needle and thread
As fine as I could sew,
And a thimble from Baltimore
To make that needle go.
Cho:

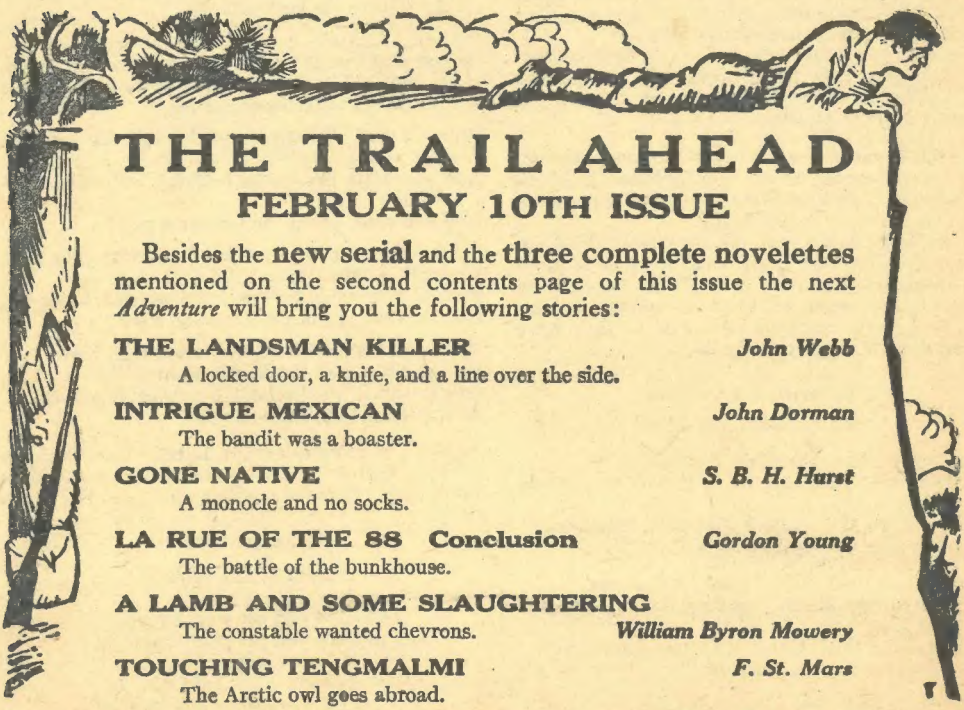
She told me that she loved me,
She called me "sugar plum."
She throwed her arms around me
Like a grape vine round a gum.
Cho:

Finger ring, finger ring
Shines like glittering gold;
How I love my pretty little girl
O God in Heaven knows!
O get along home, Cindy, Cindy,
Get along home, Cindy, Cindy,
Get along home, Cindy, Cindy,
I'll marry you sometime.

Another that I'd like to print if there were room is "I Wish I Were a Mole in the Ground," but you can hear Mr. Lunsford himself sing that if you will get hold of an Okeh phonograph record 40155.

DON'T forget that I still want all the old songs of every variety that you can send in, and all the hints you can give that will put me on the track of singers. There are still a number of photographs of scenes on the trip printed on postcards and waiting for those of you who help out in either of the ways mentioned above.

ADDRESS all letters to R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.



THE TRAIL AHEAD

FEBRUARY 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial** and the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE LANDSMAN KILLER — *John Webb*
A locked door, a knife, and a line over the side.

INTRIGUE MEXICAN — *John Dorman*
The bandit was a boaster.

GONE NATIVE — *S. B. H. Hurst*
A monocle and no socks.

LA RUE OF THE 88 Conclusion — *Gordon Young*
The battle of the bunkhouse.

A LAMB AND SOME SLAUGHTERING
The constable wanted chevrons. — *William Byron Mowery*

TOUCHING TENGMALMI — *F. St. Mars*
The Arctic owl goes abroad.

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by Arthur O. Friel, Thomson Burtis, W. C. Tuttle, L. Patrick Greene, Fairfax Downey, W. Townend, T. S. Stribling and Leonard H. Nason; and short stories by Charles Victor Fischer, William Westrup, John Joseph, T. T. Flynn, Robert Carse, L. Paul, James Parker Long, Don Waters, Alan LeMay, George E. Holt, Clements Ripley and others; stories of white men up the Amazon, traders in Africa, aviators in the oil-fields, cowboys on the Western range, doughboys on the Western front, hardcase skippers and bucko mates on the high seas, desert riders in Morocco, daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.

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"The Man They Hanged"

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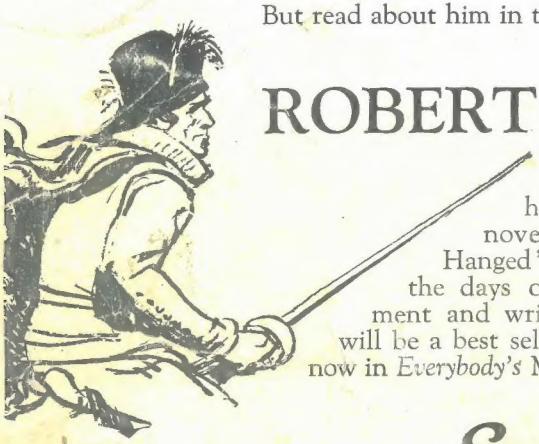
They called him a bloody pirate—murderer—cutthroat—thief. They accused him of every crime they could invent. They blackened his name, disgraced his family . . . Before a false court he was tried. Perjured witnesses swore against him. A craven judge denied him justice. He was convicted, sentenced and hanged—to save the very nobles he had served, innocently, honestly and too trustingly.

Who was he?—this gallant, fearless gentleman, this splendid sea captain? His name was Captain William Kidd, and he . . .

But read about him in the thrilling story "The Man They Hanged."



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